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**(editors)**

# INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING:

## Perspectives from a Czech-German Viewpoint

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# INTRODUCTION

In a steadily growing European Union, intercultural and cross-cultural communication as a central goal in education is of vital importance and has been widely implemented in classrooms at every institutional level. Since Europe does not pursue an ideal of *ex pluribus unum*, but is increasingly promoting its unique status as a *Europe de régions*, plurilingualism and cultural diversity constitute the main characteristics of EU language policies. This idea has been put into effect in cross-border regions all over the European Union, which have been established during the last 30 years. Their aim is to bring together what had been divided in the past, either through nationalistic politics or as a consequence of annexation.

In this context, the border between the Czech Republic and its German-speaking neighbours has its own particular and complex history, which quite often makes intercultural and cross-cultural contact difficult between the members of these two cultures even today. Communication is even more complicated when the languages involved are more or less unrelated, as is the case with Czech and German. However, such linguistic and cultural borderlines need to be overcome in order to ensure a stable and culturally well-balanced Europe, which is one major reason for the endorsement of the study of neighbouring languages. This implies the study of Czech in German-speaking countries and the study of German in the Czech Republic. The actual situation, though, is quite different: at the moment, communication between speakers of Czech and German happens mainly in English, which once more serves as a *lingua franca*. Evidently, English has been and will be the international language (not only) of the European Union, while at the same time it is quite clear that a monolingual Europe is a threat to cultural diversity and political stability.

Thus, teachers of English in European classrooms face a new challenge: not only intercultural competence and cross-cultural awareness have to be achieved; English language teaching is no longer tantamount to the teaching of the language and culture of English-speaking countries across the world – while classroom reality still mainly focuses on Great Britain and the United States of America. In the European Union as well as in the world-wide community, English is the preferred *lingua franca* when speakers of different native languages meet and communicate. It serves as lowest common denominator in intercultural contacts and offers a relatively neutral and culturally detached space for first encounters. Therefore, the role of English and the teaching of English within the framework of a plurilingual and pluricultural Europe need reconsidering, if the educational aim is to raise responsible European citizens who share a common human interest.

One example of such a cross-cultural European encounter is the Czech-German seminar at Tejmlov in the Bohemian Forest in 1998. Students and teachers from both the University of Augsburg and the University of České Budějovice met for a week in order to discuss general aspects of intercultural communication and specific aspects of Czech-German relations. English was the denominated medium of communication and served as a common ground in order to overcome first inhibitions and to initiate cross-cultural contact. The seminar successfully contributed to mutual understanding and active tolerance and helped to revive the historically strong ties between the two cultures.

It also marked the foundation stone of successful academic cooperation between the two universities: After some initial bureaucratic difficulties, an ERASMUS exchange programme was established between the English Departments of both universities in 2003, with a since constant and flourishing flow of students and lecturers alike from both sides. In 2004 and 2005, Czech-

German seminars were hosted at the EXPOLINGUA in Prague, the International Fair for Languages, Education and Cultures. Here, students of English as a Foreign Language from Augsburg and Budweis explored "Czech-German Relations and EU languages and cultures" and contemplated the "Teaching of English in a European Context", while enjoying the sights of Prague in front of an intercultural background. These educational projects and all their participants have helped to promote cross-cultural contacts and overcome intra-European borders and preconceptions.

Another result of the profitable contact between the University of Augsburg and the University of České Budějovice is the volume on hand, to which teachers from both universities contributed:

This book presents aspects of cross-cultural and intercultural competence in foreign language learning from a Czech-German viewpoint. The main focus lies on the historical, linguistic and current intercultural relationships between the Czech Republic and Germany, while discussing the role of English as a means of communication between two different cultures and languages. Special attention is paid to the emotional preconceptions of foreign language learners which occur in intercultural encounters, when the following questions are addressed from various perspectives: In what way do cultural stereotypes affect successful intercultural communication? How can they be dealt with in the EFL classroom? Can misunderstandings and difficulties which so often arise in situations of intercultural contact and interaction be prevented through not only language teaching, but specifically teaching culture?

The editors would like to thank all the Czech and German teachers and students who helped make the first Czech-German seminar at Tejmlov an intercultural success and establish a hopefully long-lasting cooperation between the University of Augsburg and the University of České Budějovice, in particular Gunter Lorenz, who initiated the project, as well as all the scholars who contributed to this volume for their continued support of the project. Special thanks are due to Christian Pfeiffer for his help with the editing and the preparation of the layout.

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# I.

# TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND CULTURES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

# 'BORDER COMPETENCE' AND ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE: THE TEJMLOV SEMINAR

*Konrad Schröder (Augsburg)*

*In a Europe of semi-independent regions, the notion of 'border competence' is of vital importance. We are confronted with linguistic and cultural borderlines that need to be overcome in order to ensure the interior stability and the cultural well-being of the European Union. Cross-cultural communication is particularly difficult in the case of two more or less unrelated languages. A perfect example of such a situation is the Czech-German linguistic and cultural relationship, which is examined in this article. Intercultural encounters like the Tejmlov seminar, a meeting of students and teachers from the University of České Budějovice and the University of Augsburg, can make an important contribution to mutual understanding, active tolerance and a revival of the historically strong ties between the two cultures. In this context, the article also addresses the question whether English as a 'lingua franca' is a suitable medium of communication to initiate contact and to help overcome dividing intra-European borders.*

## 1 Divided by a common history – and re-united under European auspices

Before 1918 the Czech-German border had been one of the least impeditive and least guarded national borderlines in Europe. Bohemia, as the western part of the Czech Republic was called in those days, was a kingdom within the Habsburg Empire, with a largely bilingual and bi-cultural population made up of a majority of native speakers of Czech and a strong German speaking minority. It is an interesting point to notice the fact that the German speaking fraction never called themselves Austrians, though at least the Southern Moravian minority had strong ethnic and linguistic ties with the Austrian *Weinviertel.* They considered themselves – following the traditional pan-European approach of defining oneself regionally rather than nationally – as Bohemians and Moravians and they called themselves Germans, not because they were Germans, but because they spoke German. It was not until the latter decades of the 19th century that the traditional identity of a German speaking national of a multilingual empire was gradually transformed into the idea of an expatriate German living in Slavonic surroundings. The transformation was a consequence of the romantic belief in the congruence of *Volk* and *Sprache* (the people as a haven of ethnic belonging and united by the same language), a concept which had given rise to crypto-racism by no later than 1813. Under Hitler, the German speaking nationals of the First Czechoslovak Republic were viewed as 'pioneers of Teutonic culture creating *Lebensraum* (living space) amongst the racially inferior Slavs' – and far too many of them most willingly believed in the racist fraud.

To be true, the two ethnic groups had always been socially stratified – with plenty of overlap, though, the higher ranks of the social ladder being rather more German-speaking (for historical reasons), and the lower ranks having stronger links with the local Slavonic culture. In spite of the pioneers of the Slavonic Revival of the late 18th and early 19th century, some of them outstanding linguists and language teachers such as Dobrovský, Tham and Tomsa, German had remained the favoured language of the liberally educated urban population, especially so in Prague, where in those days the Czech, German and Jewish populations coexisted peacefully. In fact, *Prager Deutsch* (Prague German) was one of the well-respected modified standards of High German, which it remained until the eve of the Second World War. "Never say die", as Joshua Fishman would put it: just as Yiddish, *Prager Deutsch* has survived.

Generally speaking, the Bohemian and Moravian language situation was close to current concepts of diglossia: it was not generally considered proper bilingualism. Family names, e.g., were translated as a matter of course from one language into the other. If the priest was "Czech" (i.e. closer to the Czech culture), the name of the married couple would be taken down as *Jelinek*, if the priest was "German", the same couple would figure under the name of *Hirsch*.

The picture drawn here of the Czech-German linguistic and cultural relationship would be one-sided, though, without a brief review of some of the historical developments underlying it, and without a mention of the cultural and political fate of the First Czechoslovak Republic of post-1918.

An at times politically and economically powerful component of the Holy German Empire, Bohemia had lost its (semi-)independence with the victory of the Catholic League over the Bohemian Estates in the battle of the White Mountain of 1620. As a consequence, a basically Protestant country with a strong Hussite tradition became re-catholicized under Habsburg rule. Practicing Protestants and related sects such as the Moravian Brothers were driven out of the country, their estates were forfeit. One of the victims of religious cleansing was Jan Amos Komenský, better known under his Latin name of Comenius. A new ruling class, small though it may have been, was brought in from the Catholic German-speaking regions of the Habsburg Empire and kept under close political and religious observation. The religious re-education of the country was largely taken care of by the Jesuit order.

The traumatic experience of the first half of the 17th century has had deep repercussions on the Czech approach to both Catholicism and the German speaking world. The Czech were made to obey (the word for "yes" in current spoken Czech is not the Slavonic term "da", but the word "jo", which is clearly derived from German "ja"); characters such as the world famous Schwejk (German spelling) embody the Czech approach to Habsburg superiority. The First Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938) tried to underpin the linguistic and spiritual rebirth of the romantic and post-romantic period with a newly recovered political identity. With the rise of the Republic as a monolingual national state, however, the ancient concept of diglossia disappeared and German became a mere minority language. Many German speaking Bohemians and Moravians now started to consider themselves as outcasts on their own inherited territory, and they began to look for cultural and linguistic allies beyond the borders of the new state. To a certain extent, it is the Czech patriotism of post-1918 which triggers off the patriotism of the German minority, which will turn into blatant nationalism and racism during the short-lived Second Republic (1938-1939):

*Rot, weiß, blau,*
*trägt jede böhmische Sau.*
*Schwarz, rot, gelb,*
*trägt jeder deutsche Held.*

Every Bohemian pig will wear the colours red, white and blue (the colours of the house of Luxemburg, which became the Czech colours in late medieval times – cf. not only the national flag, but also the traditional festive costumes of the Czech women), whereas every German hero will wear the colours black, red and yellow (gold – the German colours of the revolution of 1848 and the colours of the Weimar Republic). The chant was widespread amongst Bohemian and Moravian Germans in the decades between the First and the Second World War.

The modified situation of the German minority after 1918 was experienced by many of them as a collective disgrace. This made it easy for Nazi ideology to infiltrate the *Sudetenland* and to

kindle a nationalist movement headed by the *Sudetendeutsche Partei* of cunning Konrad Henlein, who managed to assure the Czech president, Masaryk, that all he wished for was a "decentralization of administration" and political freedom for the German minority "within the scope of the constitution", while his real aim was to pave the way for Hitler's final takeover on March 15, 1939. The dismantling of the First Czechoslovak Republic and the ensuing terror by both the SS and parts of the (ideologically blinded) German military led to the Beneš Decrees of 1945, ordering the expulsion of the German minority – regardless of their political creed before and during Nazi rule – under the key word of *Národní Výbor* ('National Committee', but also translatable as 'national choice' or 'choice of national belonging'), an atrocious case of ethnic cleansing and yet another breech of international law, this time by the Czech side. Beneš himself, President of State from 1935 till the end of the First Republic and re-elected in June 1946, fell victim to the communist regime in 1948, having refused to sign the constitution produced by the parties of the National Front.

The Beneš Decrees have never been declared null and void, and they have remained a source of political unrest, especially with the descendants of those expelled, but also in the context of negotiations between the two countries in general. The present state of affairs has its European implications, since Germany and Austria must give their consent to the Czech admission into the European Union, and this approval may very well be made dependent on the annulment. On the other hand, the annulment may have its financial consequences, as the expelled Germans and their descendants will ask for some kind of compensation – a difficult task for the Czech Republic in its present economic situation.

The survey shows that the idea of good neighbourhood between the Czech Republic and Germany, of European partnership and of a new spiritual communion still suffers from what may be called the burden of history. As long as this burden is present in the minds and souls of the people on both sides of the border (and present even in legislation), it is imperative to find ways, especially for the young generation, to get together in order to know and tolerate each other on equal terms – if not more than that. This is the reason why students of English of the University of České Budějovice (Budweis) and students of English of the University of Augsburg, along with their teachers, went for a joint seminar on matters linguistic and cultural in a beautiful and remote place in the outstanding natural scenery of the Bohemian Forest.

## 2 The language barrier and the language question

In spite of a written tradition that goes back to the first half of the 16th century (and includes some of Komenský's writings), Czech only emerges as a national language in the latter half of the 18th century, as part and parcel of a pan-Slavonic revival all over Eastern Central Europe including language, literature and the arts. This movement with its heyday in the first half of the 19th century continues until World War I.

German had been present on Czech territory ever since the Middle Ages, not only through German-speaking settlements in most parts of the country, but also through the continual influx of German-speaking artisans and tradesmen, and through a German minority of long standing in the capital of Prague. Between 1620 and 1918, German serves as the (unofficial) first language in the Habsburg kingdom of Bohemia, with Latin being the official one. The 16th century produces

a wealth of bilingual, sometimes trilingual (including Latin) teaching materials focussing on Czech and German, a good example being Ondreg Klatovský's anonymous *Knížka v českem a německém jazyku složená kterak by Čech německy a Němec česky čísti psáti i mluviti, učiti se měl. Ein Büchlein in böhmischer und deutscher Sprache, wie ein Böhm deutsch, desgleichen ein Deutscher Böhmisch lesen, schreiben und reden lernen soll* (Prague: Netholický 1540, with nine further editions between 1543 and 1603).

As pointed out earlier in this text, the First Czechoslovak Republic is based on Czech as its national language, though it continues to have large German-speaking minorities especially in its northern, western and southern regions, and a number of language islands along the Slovak border (and in Slovakia itself). The use of German is prohibited in 1945.

Outside Czechoslovakia, Czech has never been considered a worthy subject of large scale language instruction. In spite of a decree by Empress Maria Theresia in 1778 asking for instruction "in my countries' own languages", very little was in fact achieved in this domain, at least outside Vienna (with its Czech minority and the *Theresianische Ritterakademie* teaching foreign languages to future diplomats). In most cases, those who had to know both Czech and German were recruited on the spot, inside Bohemia, and prepared by a Jesuit schooling (later to be taken over by other orders or the state) or by private tuition. This practice continued well into the early days of the 20th century.

Even in the German Democratic Republic with its ideology of social brotherhood little was done to promulgate Czech language and culture. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, the German *Länder* of Bavaria and Saxony successfully started teaching Czech as a third or fourth foreign language in some of the schools close to the border. In addition, a bilingual school based on Czech and German was established at Pirna on the river Elbe. This experiment has been quite successful and is now being doubled by a bilingual German and Czech school in Prague.

German nazism, the post-war Czech retaliation, and the era of communism have created a language barrier along a borderline more than 600 kilometres long, a frontier that must be redeveloped as a zone of fruitful cultural exchange and cooperation rather than a means of fearful isolation. In this context, the development of 'border competence' as the ability to establish familiar cultural contacts on both sides of the dividing line (in order to overcome it) is of paramount importance. Border competence implies the use of neighbouring languages. With the current situation, however, a first beginning must be made through the use of English as an international medium of communication, since this language now tends to be the first foreign language in both countries.

## 3 Border Competence in the European Union

With regard to the linguistic and cultural well-being of the European Union, and in fact its interior stability, the notion of border competence is crucial. Europe is a multilingual and pluricultural entity with linguistically and culturally autonomous regions – regions which have been well established for many centuries. It is not a new and virtually empty territory for settlers of diverse languages, cultures and creeds to move into. The American *E pluribus unum*, in this context, is not an adequate perspective.

Within the European Union, economic borders do no longer exist, and political borders will gradually disappear. The linguistic and cultural borders, however, will remain, and they will become even more tangible, since the only way of ensuring a long-term political stability in this part of the world is to create a Europe of semi-independent regions (*L'Europe des régions*), instead of following the more traditional pattern of a Europe of national states as 'fatherlands' (*L'Europe des patries*). The regional structure of Europe is older and more natural than the national structure, which only superseded in post-Renaissance times.

Border competence implies the ability to peacefully overcome existing linguistic and cultural borderlines by letting oneself be immersed in the culture or cultures of the neighbouring people. In this context, cultural and linguistic authenticity is particularly important, and appropriate proficiencies and ways of communicating must be developed. In the case of closely related languages (such as e.g. German and Dutch, Italian and Spanish, Polish and Czech), cross-border communication will be less hampered, linguistically (but not necessarily culturally) more easy-going than in the case of two more or less unrelated languages such as German and Czech.

## 4 Reflecting intercultural communication: the Tejmlov seminar

The seminar in the Bohemian Forest had its many particular attractions, but also its pitfalls: the participants of both sides, meeting for the first time, were not students of German or western Slavonic languages, but of English. There was no direct link with the respective partner language and culture. Instead, the common centre of interest was a third language and its cultures. Would it be possible to use the domain of English Studies as the common ground for a meeting that aimed at developing border competence? What bearing would the use of English have on the choice of topics and the modes of communication? Would it generate the amount of mutual empathy needed to make the encounter a success?

Both sides had agreed to make the communicative situation of the group one of the central topics of the meeting, thus introducing a strong element of linguistic, cultural and historical self-reflection. In accordance with this approach, topics of cultural divergence, intercultural competence, the educational implications of language borders, and – first and foremost perhaps – the linguistic and communicative structure of the European Union on the verge of its eastern extension were discussed, with special attention to the role of English. This focus created a common framework for the more traditional English Studies topics treated, a framework based on the actual political, economic, and cultural situation of the participants.

In the field of European language politics, the participants agreed on a number of points which basically reflect the views endorsed by both the Council of Europe and the General Direction 22 of the European Commission:

- The European Union is a multilingual entity, its languages being part of its cultural heritage and riches. The upkeep of linguistic and cultural diversity is essential for the interior stability of the EU. Linguistic and cultural diversity must not be considered as an obstacle to unity.

- In order to preserve the regional cultures of Europe, the languages of the various European regions must be kept alive. One means of keeping them alive is the study of languages outside their own territory through foreign language tuition.

- Every EU national should have three languages: their own, an international language and at least one additional one, preferably a neighbouring language. The bilingualism aimed at by most educational systems in Europe so far (mother tongue plus international language) does not suffice.

- Trilingualism in this sense is also to be considered as a key to the development of a European identity (in addition to the regional and national identities), as it involves the faculty to feel (at least partially) at home in at least two European cultures (without having to use English as *lingua franca* all the time).

- Trilingualism implies at least two foreign languages in any type of secondary school curriculum. Trilingualism can be achieved more easily if the notion of "partial competence" is taken into account. A learner of one or several neighbouring languages need not show the same degree of competence in all four skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing); it may well make sense to focus on the receptive or oral skills.

- In a global European perspective, receptive multilingualism as the ability to use one's mother tongue and be understood by the foreign language listener or reader, is the only valid alternative to a communicative model based on the (restricted) use of an international language, in most cases hampered by low levels of proficiency. Receptive multilingualism allows communication to flow more naturally, with less potential misunderstanding and without semantic reduction. The speakers/writers use their mother tongue, taking into account that they are addressing non-native listeners or readers. Additionally, the listeners or readers will be exposed to the cultural original of the message, and not to some kind of awkward, culture-free translation into an international medium of communication. The model is based on the fact that developing a receptive command of a given language is easier than attaining productive proficiency, especially so if the mother tongue and the target language are related.

- No school system can offer all the many languages that Europe has, and cater adequately for whatever the future language needs of the learner will be. Therefore, it is important to develop foreign language tuition as a gateway, a *Ianua Linguarum* (Komenský), to a life-long language (and culture) learning. Learning how to learn is, in this context, a new and important target.

- Multiculturalism does not exist on the international and/or interregional level alone, it exists also locally. In the olden days, foreign-ness was a feature of distant worlds; nowadays, however, the predominant type of foreign-ness is "near-foreign-ness", the co-habitation of people from different cultural backgrounds, whether they be EU nationals or not. In this context, the development of intercultural competence becomes a prime target within any educational system.

## 5 Summing up: the Tejmlov seminar as a case study

Watching the communicative development within the seminar was in itself a fascinating experience: English as an international language proved to be the suitable medium to initiate friendly (semi-formal) contacts and to serve as a supplementary language, a linguistic anchor, whenever needed. At the same time, especially so in social contacts outside the academic programme, there was an amazing resurge of German, ranging from an almost near-native command of the language, via individual phrases, fixed expressions and exclamations, to meta-linguistic questions of how to express certain matters in the other language. The German participants, in their turn, were soon beginning to pick up words and phrases from the Czech language; those who had done some Russian at school went in for intra-Slavonic comparison. Language contact past and present became a favourite topic of evening conversations: what German loanwords are there in Czech and why? Have Slavonic languages influenced German and how? What was the role of Yiddish with regards to Czech or German? Family and place names of Slavonic origin in German, or of German origin in Bohemia and Moravia helped to retrieve long-forgotten intercultural trails, a topic that led on to the intercultural comparison of popular habits and folklore, and, in this context, the mutual dismantling of hetero-stereotypes.

The seminar has definitely helped to promote the kind of active tolerance needed for the development of empathetic ties. Linguistically speaking it has underlined the fact that the use of English is not necessarily counterproductive to the development of border competence, if, at the same time, it becomes the subject of a wider reflection on the functions of language and language use, and if the potential of other forms of communication is used – including minimal language and receptive multilingualism as well as meta-linguistic procedures such as asking for language items. In the case of the joint seminar at Tejmlov, the use of English in the first place made it easier for some of the native speakers of Czech to “untie” their knowledge of German, whereas, for the native speakers of German, English was a more neutral platform to ask questions about Czech history, ideological matters and culture in general.

# TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH UNDER THE COMMUNIST REGIME: A PERSONAL ACCOUNT

*Marie Ernestová (České Budějovice)*

*When I was considering what to speak about at Tejmlov it occurred to me that perhaps I should speak about something that usually cannot be found in textbooks, and I decided to share some of my personal experiences from the so-called 'socialist era'.*
*I am convinced that people should know and should never forget. I have not had many opportunities of visiting Germany and meeting German people. But when I met people from Britain or the USA, it has sometimes seemed to me that they were inclined to take too many things for granted. Nowadays, the same is true with young people from the Czech Republic.*

## 1 The great Czech tradition of culture and education

The Czech Republic is a country with a remarkable cultural and educational heritage. The country has an extensive, varied musical and theatrical tradition originating in ancient folk and church music, and a prestigious theatre scene (matching that of New York or London), and it also has a remarkable film output (Forman, Menzel). Scientists, such as Mendel and Freud, whose merits have usually been attributed to the German nation, were born here, as was the writer Franz Kafka. Though a small country, the Czech Republic has produced two Nobel prize winners (Heyrovský, Seifert).

The beginnings of education on Czech territory are connected with the church schools in the 9th- and 10th-century monasteries. The earliest lay schools are recorded from as early as the 13th century. A particularly important impulse to the development of education was the foundation of Prague University by the Czech King and Roman Emperor Charles IV in 1348. Prague University was the first institution of higher learning in Central Europe. As such it became a centre of both church and lay education. Its influence on the development of education in this country and later the process of national self-awareness cannot be underestimated.

A first Latin grammar school registering 120 students was established at the Prague Jesuit college of Clementinum as far back as 1556. A compulsory six-year school which taught all children reading, writing and arithmetic was introduced in 1774. First semi-vocational schools came into being on the very eve of industrialisation at the end of the 18th century. Compulsory eight-year school attendance for all children aged six to fourteen was introduced in 1869.

With the rise of the independent Czechoslovak state in 1918, the school system underwent significant changes: a network of common schools for the ordinary people was completed, the number of secondary schools increased, and new universities came into existence. Before the Second World War, the Czechoslovak system of education ranked among the most developed in the world. Unfortunately, the 1970s witnessed the decline of the system due to the narrow perception of education in the hands of the new rulers. From this time onward, the school system was meant to instil nothing but a vocational training for the future labour force.

In the days of communist rule, most teachers and educational workers lived and worked under a cloud of lies. Czechoslovak history, culture and civilization were subjected to a radical and wide-spread reappraisal. The communists took the glorious tradition of universal education and high literacy as a starting point for reinterpretation and manipulation of the educational system. The central ideas of some of the most prominent Czech writers and intellectuals were distorted to

comply with the state's ideology: meaningless myths were created, thus taking the place of well-established views. Alois Jirašek, for example, who wrote historical novels about the Hussite wars in the 15th century, was portrayed as a 'fighter for working class interests'.

The communist political system tied the country to the East for the next 42 years, due to strategic imperatives, economic creeds and political organisation. Culturally, however, it managed to keep some of its humanist and democratic tradition, which goes back to Jan Hus and the great 17th-century philosopher, Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius). The latter, a distinguished pedagogue, philosopher, theologian and reformer, stated in as early as the first half of the 17th century: "We are all citizens of one world – what hinders us from gathering in one community?"

The Czech Republic has always been a country whose outstanding figures were reformers, educators and philosophers, rather than conquerors or military leaders. Its history, traditions, perspectives and inclinations are essentially western. In this context, it deserves to be mentioned that the first president of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918 was the philosopher Thomas Garrigue Masaryk and similarly, it is no accident of history that our last president, Václav Havel, is a playwright and intellectual.

## 2 The decline of education under socialist rule

It would be wrong to say that socialism did not bring anything to the country. Amongst its positive points are:

- Men and women enjoyed equal rights.
- Medical care was free of charge.
- Expectant mothers were entitled to full medical care and to a paid maternity leave of three years.
- Monetary loans were provided for young couples to enable them to start a family.
- Facilities were provided to help parents take care of their families, such as nursery schools and kindergartens, school clubs and school canteens.
- Local travel was relatively inexpensive and commuters to work were entitled to reduced fares on trains and buses.
- Lunches in school and workplace cafeterias were subsidised by the state and/or the employers.
- Pensions of 50-60% of an average salary were paid to men from age 60 and women from age 53, depending on the number of children they had raised.
- Books, theatres, cinemas and concerts were inexpensive and education at all levels was free.

Why then was education in such a terrible state and why does it need remodelling now?

In February 1948, a communist *coup d'état* took place, and from that year onward one educational reform followed another. Their characteristic was the effort to fashion a uniform school that would fit in with communist ideology and central control. Reforms not only concerned the content of instruction, its methods and forms, but also the renaming of schools, the duration of lessons and the length of compulsory school attendance. What these reforms lacked, however, was a clear and coherent philosophy of education. The communist regime did not

accept the view that education is meant to enable people to live their culture and to try to understand and experience the culture of others. In order to re-establish this basic aim of education the recent changes in our school system since the 1989 revolution have been effected.

In communist times, the strictly implemented educational reforms merely served the narrow-minded ideological conception of the regime. This is how a comprehensive school system started in 1948 and how the example of the Russian 11-year school was copied in 1953.[1] In fact, almost every new Minister of Education triggered off a new school reform.[2] At the same time, a rigorous suppression of any kind of criticism combined with educational centralism and heavy ideological bias rendered positive changes impossible and made even partial adjustments a failure.

Even in the days when communist rule was on its way out, educational discussions tended to be concerned with minor problems rather than the more crucial ones, for example:

- There were frequent discussions about the fact that the majority of school teachers was female. The underlying truth, however, that many male teachers – tired of being forced to lie to their pupils – would leave their jobs as soon as an alternative career offered itself was never addressed. In fact, it was easier for men to leave school altogether.
- Children were automatically expected to join the Young Pioneers' Organisation, where they would spend most their free time. Educational workers would discuss the low appeal of the Young Pioneers' Organisation without, however, openly saying that such an organisation should not be imposed on them.
- Teachers would again and again discuss the absence of moral education in schools. Of course, what many of them were thinking when doing so was religious education. Such lessons were severely restricted. In spite of the fact that the constitution of 1960 granted the freedom of religion, parents did not dare to demand religious education for their children, knowing that religious inclinations within the family might hamper their child's future prospects.

Generally speaking, discussion on improvements seldom centred on long-term educational objectives. Our schools had become a servile tool for implementing the campaigns of a socialist government. On the one hand, the state decreed that lessons were more important for a child than e.g. catering for a sick parent, but on the other hand it also decreed that celebrating the arrival of a state dignitary from another socialist country was more important than having lessons.

## 3 Politicising education: the 1970s

The tendency to politicise the school system markedly increased in the 1970s, the period of the so-called 'normalisation' which followed the Russian invasion of our country in August 1968. For teachers, this period proved in many ways to be more difficult than the age of Stalin.

[1] Please note that at that time even some Soviet educationalists (such as Gontcharov) objected to this – regarding, on the contrary, our own educational system as an example worth following.

[2] The last of these reforms (in 1976) introduced ten years of compulsory education for all, the first eight of which were basic schooling; the last two years were to be spent either at *gymnasium* (an upper secondary academic institution), or at a school for vocational training.

Any teacher who wanted to achieve a higher academic status had to pass an examination in Marxist-Leninist ideology.[3] In order to receive political instruction, teachers within the individual schools were divided into two groups, the Communist Party members and the non-members. At my own school, the situation was rather amusing: out of 36 members of staff, only three were communists, whereas the rest had no political affiliation. As we were a school with mostly afternoon and evening classes, one Tuesday morning every three weeks was set aside for political instruction. The topics were allocated in advance to individual teachers for fear that a (would-be) spontaneous discussion would be replaced by silence. Attendance was compulsory; in case of illness the topic had to be submitted in written form and a colleague had to read it out. Teachers usually went about this matter in a rather formal way: they reiterated somebody else's ideas, either because they had very little to contribute to the subject themselves or because they considered it too risky to add something of their own – for fear of being accused of revisionist inclinations. The most difficult part was not to say anything incompatible with one's own conscience. One of my colleagues, an elderly lady, would always forego her lunch after such a political instruction and go to the local swimming-pool instead, saying she had to cleanse herself of the experience.

It should be borne in mind that ordinary teachers cannot really be blamed for the mental distortions imposed by a totalitarian system, since merely raising one's voice in protest against the established norms could have had grave and irreparable consequences regarding one's professional and personal future.

I can still remember the time when the famous Charter 77, the most progressive human rights document in the history of Communist Europe, was published: consequently, the working population, including teachers and other intellectuals, clerks and factory workers were required to condemn it publicly. When two teachers at a neighbouring school merely asked about the content of that document, claiming that they could only condemn what they knew, they both immediately had to leave their school and ended up in quarry as manual workers.

I was luckier. When we were asked to show our disapproval of the document, I did not put up my hand either. My headmistress pretended not to have seen it, perhaps because she needed me at work at that time, perhaps she wanted to save herself the embarrassment of having to explain to the authorities that she had allowed a revisionist to work at her school.

Let me add a few more words on what the socialist school was based upon.

After the communist *coup d'état* in February 1948, our educational system was abruptly isolated from educational reforms in the western world. As I stated above, compared to the standards achieved in the First Republic in the period between 1918 and 1939, these standards were now narrowed down to a mere training in personal and political discipline and in vocational matters. The education system became strictly centralized, the Ministry of Education having the monopoly to determine curricula and textbooks, with the objective to produce a pliable, obedient labour force to serve the state economy. This situation reminds me of a passage in Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*, when Mr. Gradgrind, a teacher, proposes:

> Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and sort out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, Sir!

The quotation shows that the educational politics of the post-1948 socialist state had scarcely developed from the principles of the 19th century. Great emphasis was put on learning isolated

[3] My own faculty, for example, employed a Czech-speaking Russian solely for that purpose.

facts by rote, which had an impact on almost all kinds of study areas and subjects. The principal means of learning was that of memorizing texts. The new system, which put rote-learning above cognitive learning and obedience above creativity, also affected colleges and universities. Every student capable of independent thought – let alone a teacher – became an object of distrust and thus was subjected to scrutiny, harassment and the threat of reprisal.

Let me at this point relate another personal example: I wrote an article on how to use pictures cut out of magazines for learning grammatical forms and for encouraging spontaneous conversation in my English classes. I managed to have it published in the *English Teaching Forum* (Washington) in 1981 without having asked anybody's approval. I wanted to show that vivid sensory teaching facilitates the understanding of foreign language phenomena. After about six months I was summoned to my superior's office where I was reprimanded and asked to give a detailed explanation of my reasons for writing that article and publishing it in the West. I replied that I wanted to share the joy I derived from teaching English with other people of the same profession. I did not lose my job, but my superior reproved me for an attempt to endanger her position and my mail was censored thereafter.

## 4 Teaching English in a hostile environment

For a non-involved reader it may be hard to comprehend the difficulty of having a normal teacher-pupil relationship under the constant scrutiny of a school management more intent on communist evangelising than on the educational enlightenment of its students. To illustrate this, let me once again share some events of my own teaching life.

As a teacher at a foreign language school, I always tried to prepare a somewhat special lesson before the Christmas holidays because I knew the students appreciated it and because it taught them something interesting about life and customs in English-speaking countries – something that could be compared with our own situation. The headmistress often came to inspect my Christmas lesson because she feared that precisely this sort of thing might occur. I would then always speak about grammar while she was present and when she had had enough of it and left, the moment the door clicked behind her we would convert the classroom to celebrate the season with fairy tales, traditional carols and even festive food.

The same headmistress ordered us to leave out Chapter 47 in our English textbook because it contained the line: "Mr. Vesely went to Britain on the invitation of the British Council." Even though it was an officially approved textbook and was recommended by the Ministry of Education in Prague, she did not like the mention of the British Council, claiming that it was an organisation which had collaborated with Nazi Germany. I objected, saying that leaving the whole lesson out would attract more attention to it than dealing with it in the normal way. This argument was brushed aside as irrelevant. When, in 1991, the British Council opened its resource centre in my town, the same former headmistress abandoned her ideological scruples and hurried in, demanding to be listed as an honorary member.

Another sad feature of our past regime is the fact that children were induced to accept what they were told at home as being closer to the truth than what they were told at school. Lesson texts, for example, always had to contain an ideological moral, which was to be written down in the class register and in the teacher's preparation with a red pen. And so it happened that those

who taught English and Russian lived in a constant state of schizophrenia: they had to state that Russian life as depicted in the manual was positive, whereas the image of the English-speaking cultures had to have negative connotations.

On one occasion the headmistress found out about an article called "Carnaby Street", which I had copied from an English magazine and used in addition to my officially approved textbook, since the topic of the lesson was 'Clothes and Fashion'. When asked to explain why I had done this, I said the article contained very useful vocabulary – in contrast to the somewhat artificial text in the textbook – and that I used it only to bring some authenticity into our classroom. The headmistress told me that with my family background (by which she referred to my once relatively well-to-do grandparents) I was not the right person to assess texts that the officially approved manual offered. This is why from that time I had to submit all my supplementary materials for inspection at least three days before I intended to use them. In this context, it is worth noticing that publications in the English language were not easily available and accessible at home: if I wanted to purchase a book written in English, I had to travel as far as Budapest or Dubrovnik.

Teachers were constantly covered up with lots of administrative and often meaningless tasks. They had to record all sorts of personal characteristics of their pupils, and gather data about their family backgrounds. It made a great difference whether one was born into a working class or an intellectual family. Teachers had to investigate the political affiliations of their pupils' parents before 1945, between 1945 and 1948, after 1948, in 1968, after 1968 and at the time being. This data was then arranged into statistical surveys according to given guidelines and regularly submitted to the educational authorities of a particular district or region.

In our centralistic and prescriptive system of education, a teacher was regarded simply as a mere agent of party or state educational policy. There was, for example, a list of resolutions passed by the Communist Party Congress every four or five years which had to penetrate the whole curriculum. Although the majority of teachers completely ignored the effect of those resolutions for our school, we had to submit a written paper describing how we had implemented those issues in our lessons. No wonder that with all these exhausting duties a great many teachers failed to find the time and energy for creative work.

In order to reduce the social status of teachers the communist government considerably reduced their pay and exercised total control of what they did. In the course of this process, working class people got artificial promotion, whereas the intelligentsia got demoted. In this way it was possible for a manual worker such as a mason, plumber, waiter, etc. to be paid a lot more than a teacher.

Professional incompetence was a key characteristic of the educational administration: the head of the Education Authority in our region, for example, was a baker and was later succeeded by a house-painter. In promoting working class non-professionals to these posts, the Communist Party followed the routine of satisfying its most devoted and trusted members. Of course these people may have had their own merits, but the different social and vocational backgrounds made it difficult for us to find a common ground.

Teachers, regardless of their university qualifications, were seen by the government to be working people without a responsibility of their own. They could not be trusted to perform their professional duties without systematic guidance, unexpected inspection and continuous supervision.

Of course the system had its negative effects on teachers' minds, generating a variety of physical and mental problems, such as:

- an indifference and inability to empathise with other people,
- anxiety of becoming a political victim, and
- stress, generated by the incongruence of personal opinion and party teaching, by emotional imbalance and by servile behaviour towards superiors.

Under the great political pressure many teachers failed to enjoy their work, lost interest in extending their knowledge and became dissatisfied with what they had achieved. No wonder, therefore, that some teachers completely gave up their pedagogical responsibility and creativity. They shifted responsibility and judgement to the top and reduced their teaching role to that of merely fulfilling assigned tasks.

## 5 Looking for change: innovation and continuity

In our present attempts to change and improve our educational system, we must carefully distinguish between features worth adopting from other countries and tendencies that we would not like to follow.

In the past few years, I have had the opportunity to gain a deeper insight into the British education system and bring home various impressions. I have seen schools with sophisticated equipment, computerized libraries, from which students could retrieve information even during the lessons. I have experienced a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom. In some other classrooms, however, I must admit that I experienced an utter lack of discipline, a lack of respect for the teacher, a lack of pride and interest in the students' own work, and sometimes such noise and chaos that prevented anyone from doing serious work.

According to my experience of some British classes I observed, Czech children have a better knowledge of world history and geography. In general, they are also better behaved and show greater respect towards their teachers and to one another. However, our students would no doubt greatly benefit if we were able to teach them the art of discursive discussion in which the British students excel.

The present changes affect education at all levels: our educational system is now based on a concept of nine years of compulsory primary education leading to a number of subsequent educational options. After 1989, school curricula were reassessed and rendered more effective, and Russian as an until then compulsory foreign language was abolished, thus relegating it to par with other foreign languages. The monolith of a uniform state education has been broken and opportunities have opened up for the creation of private and church schools and multiple-grade grammar schools. The private schools charge fees.

Schools are now free to provide alternative forms of education, and teachers can adjust curricula and use alternative textbooks if they wish; thus, there is no longer a single textbook for the whole nation. At the same time, the syllabi are constructed in a more open way. The grip of the system of education is getting less centralised, tolerating greater diversity, encouraging personal responsibility and promoting individual inventiveness and creativity.

A new legislation has considerably reinforced the autonomy of our universities and thus the power given to academic bodies. To supplement the network of universities at a time when large numbers of applicants want to enrol, new universities have been created and more faculties added.

A very positive trend has been the continuous improvement of international cooperation since November 1989. As an EU member state, the Czech Republic now has the opportunity to participate in international research projects in education. At the same time, informal cooperation is developing between teams and individuals. Lecturers from abroad contribute to our new cross-cultural experience. Since 1990 the number of exchange agreements has rapidly increased.

The societies that have lived through the totalitarian systems of the 20th century are very well aware of the fact that their future development has to be planned with great sensitivity. People who have been lost in a labyrinth are very careful about the steps they take on their way out.

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# INTERCULTURAL LEARNING IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC: THE GERMAN IMAGE

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*This article deals with foreign language teaching and intercultural learning in the Czech Republic, where I was a lecturer of German from 1994 until 2000. Drawing on teaching experiences at the University of Hradec Králové, it describes various problems of teaching intercultural matters. The image of the Germans in German textbooks will be juxtaposed with a survey of 'stereotypes about Germans' in the Czech Republic as well as the students' own experiences and opinions.*

## 1 Cultural studies and intercultural learning during the Socialist era

One can only understand foreign language pedagogy in the Czech Republic, if one considers the historical background of the last decades in the former communist countries. It was characteristic of foreign language instruction in Eastern Europe that more emphasis was placed on politically conformist methodology than on instruction. Commenting on the former German Democratic Republic, Helmut Reisener (1990: 5) writes:

> Die von den Fachdidaktikern aufzuwerfenden Fragen nach dem Was, Wieviel und Warum waren in der Zeit vor der Wende wenig relevant, denn diese Fragen waren von der alles-entscheidenden Parteiideologie vorentschieden.
> [During the period before the *Wende* the usual What, How Much, and Why posed by teaching theorists were of little relevance, as these questions had already been decided on by the omniscient party ideologists.]

This was no different in Czech foreign language didactics. Let us take the pre-revolution textbook *Didaktika cizich jaziků* (Hendrich et al. 1988) as an example: it is still the basis of instruction at the University of Hradec Králové to this day. The concept of 'local culture' is discussed in a rather perfunctory matter on a mere 5 (of a total of about 300) pages.[1] It features under the heading of 'linguistic culture' – a term which could be regarded as an aspect of intercultural learning.

This tendency of Czech language pedagogy is mirrored by Walter Apelt's (1990) criticism of Russian language instruction in the former GDR: Apelt among other things deals with the history and ideology of foreign language instruction in the GDR and the "government-dictated method dogma" (1990: 8); he deplores that the textbooks had to follow a party-political line, which "unavoidably often led to hardly authentic language which paid insufficient attention to student interests and preferences" (Apelt 1990: 9).

After the year 1989, the situation of foreign language instruction in the Czech Republic changed fundamentally. Mandatory Russian was quickly replaced by Western languages, particularly German and English. Pavel Cink (1999: 26) writes about the new situation:

> In keinem der ehemaligen Länder der sozialistischen Staatengemeinschaft war der Verfall des Russischunterrichts so schnell und so dramatisch wie in Tschechien. Seine Position wurde binnen zwei, drei Jahren im großen und ganzen von Deutsch und Englisch eingenommen, deren Unterricht heutzutage 98,5% des gesamten Fremdsprachenunterrichts für Schüler im Pflichtschulalter beträgt.
> [In none of the former communist satellite countries was the decline of Russian instruction as quick and as dramatic as in the Czech Republic. Within two, three years its place was more or less taken over

[1] See chapter *Realie a lingvorealie*, pp. 114-19.

> by German and English, which nowadays account for 98.5% of the entire foreign language instruction for school children.]

In the same passage Cink elaborates that German with more than 52% of the students still occupies first place, followed by English with a share of 45%. In terms of its dissemination as a mother tongue, German occupies second place in Europe (behind Russian), and within the European Union German represents the largest linguistic community. Cink regrets that despite this fact, German does not belong to the official European languages. This could lead sooner or later to less German and more English being learned, namely "when those who have learned German with so much diligence and industriousness discover that there is hardly an application for their German in most of the European institutions or international organizations located in Europe" (1999: 33).

## 2 Cultural contents in Czech textbooks

As Germany is very close to the Czech Republic it is surprising how little Czech students know about the German way of life. A closer look at German textbooks reveals that the students of German in the present survey were for the most part (65%) taught with a textbook from the time before 1990, entitled *Němčina pro jazykové školy*. Since money for the schools was scarce, instruction was based on this series well into the 1990s.[2] The deficiencies of these Czech textbooks of German are generally known, which is the reason why many schools, especially at primary school level (up to grade 9), have instead opted for the *DaF* textbooks *Wer? Wie? Was?* or *Das Deutschmobil*, and at the secondary school level for *Themen*. A survey among the students of the German Department at Hradec Králové nevertheless confirmed that 65% of them had still learnt their German from *Němčina*. Scrutiny of these textbooks reveals that the texts and exercises are restricted to structural language instruction. Here and there German surnames or place names will appear, but there are no other cultural references. For the most part, the texts are 'culturally neutral': they are written in a way which would apply anywhere in the world. One is reminded of what Christophel (1990: 27f.) writes about a GDR textbook (of French):

> So erscheinen die Lektionstexte handlungsarm, und die Orientierungen an als typisch empfundenen Sprachmustern führt zu einer Ansammlung starr und klischeehaft wirkender Äußerungen; hier stellt sich die Frage nach sprachlicher Authentizität.
> [The lessons' texts appear passive, and the orientation towards what are considered to be typical spoken idiomatic phrases leads to a collection of stiff, clichéd-sounding expressions; here one poses the question of linguistic authenticity.]

The large amount of passages which are concerned with the students' own country (esp. in B1, B2 and B3) can be explained as based on the recent history of the Czech Republic: travelling abroad (west) was nigh on impossible; thus, the authors worked on the scenario of meeting a German at home and informing them about Prague, Bohemian cuisine, etc.

Other passages, which deal with general topics, can be classified as 'no harm to anyone', avoiding unwanted attention from the communist regime and at the same time not offending

[2] For the present purpose we use volumes 1 to 4 (here: B1, B2, B3, B4) of the series. B1 and B2 were published in 1980 and revised in 1991. B3 and B4 were published in 1983 and revised in 1994. For this article we only use the revisions.

anyone outside the country. Unfortunately, the authors thus remained in the realm of the non-committal, often even the banal.

## 3 Stereotypes about Germans in the Czech Republic

In a cultural studies seminar for third semester students in 1996, I gave the students an assignment to interview at least three Czechs from different age groups using a standardised set of statements, for which true/false statements had to be made. This way an evaluation could be created which would offer a basis for discussion or serve as a catalyst for conversation. Altogether 136 informants were interviewed. The responses can be quantified as follows:

| STIMULUS | yes (+) | no (–) | undecided (±0) | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The Germans are friendly and cheerful. | 42.0% | 44.0% | 14.0% | –2.0% |
| The Germans have good taste in food and drink. | 42.6% | 47.0% | 10.3% | –4.4% |
| *Made in Germany* is a sign of quality. | 82.3% | 11.8% | 5.9% | 70.5% |
| The Germans are reliable and keep their promises. | 64.7% | 22.8% | 12.5% | 41.9% |
| Germany is economically strong. | 94.0% | 3.8% | 2.2% | 90.2% |
| Germany is a good place to work. | 47.8% | 42.0% | 10.3% | 5.8% |
| German men are attractive. | 16.9% | 66.9% | 16.2% | –50.0% |
| German women are attractive. | 18.4% | 72.0% | 9.6% | –53.6% |
| Germany is one of the most advanced welfare states. | 77.2% | 8.1% | 14.7% | 69.1% |

In these evaluations, Germany received positive grades with regard to its economic power, reliability and welfare system. Given these qualities, it is surprising that not more respondents saw Germany as a desirable place to work; reasons for negative responses were stated as: "the work pace in Germany is too high." The worst grades for Germans were given with regard to appearance. And as far as food and drink are concerned, it is probably due to a lack of comparison that the Czech still rate their own cuisine as the best in the world.

In order to achieve an overview of prejudices against Germans to be found among the Czech population, I conducted an anonymous opinion poll with ca. 30 students in the winter semester of 1998/99 and the summer semester of 1999. The small number of students polled was sufficient for the purpose of an exploratory survey with no 'scientific' pretensions. The students emphasised that the responses were not their own, but merely repeated what "in this country is said and believed about the Germans". The opinion poll is thus not representative, but does indicate a trend. Taking into account the multiple answers (≥ 3) only, the following picture emerges:

FAVOURABLE QUALITIES: industrious (7), punctual (5), friendly (4), dependable (4), self-confident (4)

UNFAVOURABLE QUALITIES: loud (9), boastful (6), arrogant (6), cold (5), able to afford anything through their D-Mark (5), believe they are the best in the world (5), rich (4), want to rule us (4), conceited (3), women not pretty (3), are against foreigners (3)

In interpreting these results, we can draw on the well-known psychological finding that contact with foreigners leads to a sensitisation for variances and deviations: established differences are further strengthened and emphasised (cf. Thomas 1991), which very often results in an over-estimation of oneself and an under-estimation of the stranger.

This also has a bearing on the Czechs' relationship to the Germans: even against one's own best judgement and experience, one bends reality so that it fits in with established prejudices. This is supported by a newspaper article from August 1997 in *MF Dnes* entitled "Pomoc z Německa mění názory lidí" [Aid from Germany changes people's opinion]. In the summer of 1997, a large proportion of the Czech were suffering from the 'flood of the century'. In Germany a relief effort spontaneously came into existence, as reported in the above-mentioned article. Earlier, when tourist buses with Germans drove into the villages, they were regarded with mistrust by the inhabitants. After the flood Germans in a tourist bus spontaneously took a collection of several hundred Marks and presented them to the local mayor. The German Red Cross organized collection tours. Twenty special dryers were donated to draw the dampness out of the houses' walls. Another organisation donated a quarter of a million Marks so that new wells could be drilled. Over 80% of all help came from Germany. The article goes on:

> ‚Současná situace vzbuzuje naději, že by se část obyvatel v pohraničí mohla přestat dívat na Německo skrz prsty', věří mluvří. S tím souhlasí i historik Tomáš Staněk ze Slezského ústavu v Opavě. Zároveň však upozornil, že někteří lidé by mohli humanitární pomoc chápat i jinak. ‚Nepochybuji, že se najdou lidé, kteří budou tvrdit, že si Němci obyvatele zubožené povodněmi v pohraničí kupují,' miní historik.
> [The speaker believes that 'the present situation has awakened the hope that a segment of the people in the border region could cease to regard Germany with mistrust.' Historian Tomáš Staněk from the Silesian office in Opava agrees with this assessment; at the same time he warns, however, that some people might view the humanitarian aid differently. 'I don't doubt that some people could be found who would maintain that the Germans wanted to buy up the inhabitants in the flooded border regions.']

Here, a thoroughly unfounded low motive is insinuated in accordance to the popular perception of the German aggressor, who wants to buy up 'our country' – which he had already once seized by force. As Althaus & Mog (1992) observe, a common enemy is often activated when conflicts in one's own country need to be denied or swept under the carpet. This fits in with statements such as "the Germans want to buy us up, exploit our workers", etc. After the initial euphoria at the beginning of the 1990s, disillusionment has become widely spread in the Czech Republic: the economy has not boomed as one had expected it would, the great individual wealth has not materialised, politicians more often stand out through scandals than through their actions, unemployment rises from year to year, etc. For some people the Germans are simply the cause of all misfortunes.

It is clear that such a simplistic and one-sided projection can be little more than a reflection of a culture's own self-doubts. Yet, as the above-quoted newspaper article suggests, such attributions are not necessarily irreversible. A closer look at the qualities assigned to another culture (here: the Germans) might reveal more such mechanisms of self-reflection:

- Since the Czech see the Germans as being especially hard-working, this would imply that they see themselves as less hard-working – a stereotype which the Germans would certainly apply to the Czech: Germans tend to consider themselves as exceptionally industrious.
- As far as friendliness in inter-personal contact is concerned, one can with no fear of undue generalisation state that the Czech greet strangers (even their own countrymen) in a more reserved manner than one would expect in Germany.
- Promises are often large, but one should not expect too much. Czechs themselves are aware of this and behave accordingly with their countrymen.

In these three cases the respective auto- and hetero-stereotype of both countries coincide, and prompted by a comparison with their self-image, the Czech acknowledge 'superior qualities' in the other culture. The more unfavourable responses on the other hand might be explained as follows:

- Germans are notorious for their loudness – which becomes especially conspicuous when compared to Czechs, who often make a subdued impression in public and usually converse with hushed voices only. This is a matter of up-bringing: in Czech families children are often admonished to be "not so loud".
- The opposites of 'arrogant', 'conceited' and 'proud', i.e. 'modest', 'reticent', 'insecure', 'submissive', 'unaware of one's value', etc. are certainly traits which can be found in the Czech Republic. This is probably related to the cautiousness with which people tend to treat one another.
- Closely related to the above-mentioned attributes is the belief that the Germans can afford everything. Here, much needs to be clarified. Only few Czechs know that over 5% of the German population live below the poverty threshold and that the unemployment rate is around 10%. On the other hand, the majority of Czechs cannot afford to travel abroad, due to unfavourable exchange rates. Since the cost of living increases by app. 20% p.a., and since raises in salaries and wages have lagged far behind this increase, the overall standard of living is very modest. Hence, even less affluent Germans appear to be rich in comparison.
- "German women are unattractive." It is a fact that Czech women believe they are more attractive than their German counterparts, a belief which is also shared by Czech males. Allegedly the facial features of German women are too large. This concept of beauty, however, is most certainly influenced by our daily environment.
- "The Germans think that they are the best in the world." This statement again points towards a hidden Czech feeling of inadequacy, namely that of being inferior to the larger neighbour, a fear which is unfounded if one recalls the many great men this country has produced in the areas of music, art, literature and philosophy.

As mentioned above, these were not the students' own opinions. They just repeated what people in the street would answer when asked about Germans. As will be shown below, the students' associations with Germany and its inhabitants were often completely different from people's general opinions. This shows the need for intercultural communication learning not only for a small academic group but also in modern societies all over the world. The following section describes the students' own personal experiences.

## 4 Personal experiences of Czech students with Germans

Within the framework of intercultural studies, the students had to write a personal report about their experiences with Germans. In these 'case studies', I chose the form of an essay in order to minimise the ill effect of pre-formulated questions. The evaluation of an essay is of course more time-consuming than that of a questionnaire, but has the advantage of eliciting authentic accounts from the informants – in their own words. Accordingly, the students related a number of personal experiences, which can be categorised into:

- the lifestyle of the Germans,

- the working environment, and
- experiences with school exchange programmes.

Contact to Germans in the Czech Republic were made:

- as tour-guide/escort of German tourists,
- in informal contact with young German visitors, and
- in informal contact with German tourists.

The students' evaluations of their experiences are summarised in the following table:

| AREA OF CONTACT | positive evaluation | indifferent evaluation | negative evaluation | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| as tourist in Germany | 7 | 1 | 2 | 10 |
| student exchange | 4 | 0 | 1 | 5 |
| job in Germany (e.g. au-pair) | 8 | 0 | 3 | 11 |
| relatives in Germany | 4 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| life in Germany (treatment of Czechs) | 18 | 0 | 2 | 20 |
| behaviour of Germans in CZ | 1 | 1 | 4 | 6 |
| relationship GDR – FRG | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| young Germans | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Germans at own university | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| working for German companies in CZ | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| criticism of own country | 0 | 0 | 12 | 12 |

Upon reading the students' essays, a very distinct picture emerges. The positive experiences outnumber the negative experiences with Germans. In total there are 47 positive, 5 indifferent and 18 negative comments on Germany or the Germans.[3] Friendliness, helpfulness and openness to others are especially emphasized: "they live more carefree, even though not without worries and know how to enjoy life." What repeatedly struck the Czech students is that people in Germany behave more naturally and less stiffly; in other words they were seen as less nervous, calmer and more relaxed. Older people are said to be less worn-out, fresher and more optimistic. Further noted were politeness in traffic and less callousness towards others. Also, emphasis on a healthy diet and a general readiness to do something for one's health, by going cycling or doing fitness sports are determined as differences to the Czech. Contact to other people is encouraged through invitations, parties and street parties. Furthermore, German hospitality and a certain generosity ("economical, but not miserly") are discerned. Their relationship to their environment is good. All in all, Germans are seen as "perfectly normal people."

The application of the comparative form (calmer, more relaxed, fresher, friendlier, less nervous, etc.) indicates of course a comparison with one's own country: "the Germans are calmer … than us." On several occasions students even speak of "envy" on behalf of the Czech, which leads to criticism. It is mentioned that Czech people "like to complain and criticise." And some rightly feel that whenever people meet or get together in the Czech Republic, a nervous tension predominates, whereas one is much less cramped in Germany. It is certainly an after-effect of communism that Czechs are generally more distrustful and suspicious of others than Westerners. As some papers even engage in explicit comparison, it can be said that intercultural learning has taken place: in reflecting upon another culture, a different attitude to one's own culture has been achieved; it has been questioned.

[3] NB: It is significant that 12 students took this opportunity to express a critical stance towards their own country.

Negative evaluations of Germans appear to have two main sources: the burdens of history and (more recently) tourism. First and foremost, the history of the 20th century has borne negatively on the Czechs' experiences with Germans. Young Czechs are much better informed about the events of the Nazi period than their German contemporaries. (Lack of such knowledge in young Germans was repeatedly criticised.) The Czech familiarity with the recent past is also due to the communist era, in which school classes had to view films on Nazi cruelties in the Czech Republic. In this way, the picture of the German aggressor was kept alive.

Furthermore, one finds an entirely negative attitude towards the Germans in the tourist areas in the north of the country, which are in the meantime dominated by tourists from the former GDR. Criticism is vociferous and bitter here. Before the revolution (*Wende*), relations were better there than nowadays – probably as a result of the common fate under Socialist rule.[4] In the meantime, however, former GDR citizens, and particularly those living in border areas, have become the target of envy ("We didn't have such friendly neighbours who helped us.") and resentment ("They act as if they were rulers of the world."). In short, former GDR citizens are seen as lucky profiteers from recent history, who should behave with more humility: "they have no reason to look down on us, since we were once kindred nations."

It is notable that the students' assessment is not always general and unambiguous: distinctions are made between East and West Germans, but also between Germans at home and abroad. In some student writings, one also notices a certain ambiguity along the line of "I have had good experiences, but maybe I am the exception." There is a certain fear of relying on one's own (positive) experiences, when so many other people in the country speak adversely about the Germans. Here we see again the psychological mechanism cited earlier, namely the tendency to perceive of signs and events in the framework of a desired or well-established image.

In some papers one can recognise the signs of culture shock: "For the first time I discover what family and good friends mean to me." In general, however, Czech students of German seem to evaluate the relationship with Germans differently (i.e. more positively) than the majority of their compatriots. This is due to the following factors:

- their youthful openness:
  They are not set in their ways to the same extent as older generations, and they are more liberated from historical ballast. For them, the events of 1968, 1974/75, or even the time before 1945 are much more distant than for their parents.
- the simple fact that they study German:
  If someone studies a foreign language, this shows a definite interest, maybe even a certain preference for the respective culture.

Accordingly, the students of the present survey have made the effort to gather experiences and are, with a few exceptions, prepared to revise their view of the other culture based on exactly these experiences. And this intercultural learning also entails a more critical look at their own culture.

[4] Note, however, that the damaging role which the GDR leadership played in the Soviet march into Prague in 1968 was even then negatively attributed to the Germans.

## 5 Towards a fresh attempt at intercultural learning in the Czech Republic

At Czech universities instruction is regulated by a strict syllabus, similar to that of schools. In many semesters it is compulsory for the students to receive 30 hours of instruction, which leaves little time for individual study. In German language instruction the majority of Czech colleagues base their teaching on the vocabulary list by Keprtová (1996), which is set to memorise, although some try to enrich their instruction through authentic material, newspaper and magazine articles, in other words to introduce more realism. Others limit themselves to the memorisation of lexical groups, in many cases leading to learner production which does not reflect proper German linguistic usage. This often results in differences of opinion between students who have stayed in Germany and those of their teachers who learnt their German from textbooks before the revolution.

Suggestions to leave the practical language exercises to the German guest instructors (*Lektoren*) have until now been strictly rejected by the chair of department. One can only speculate about the reason: this policy could be due to a surplus of personnel, or due to the fact that Westerners tend to view the syllabus less stringently than Czech staff – or due to the deeply rooted belief that language instruction is an instrument of power that one reluctantly gives in the hands of strangers.

The German *Lektoren* often attempt to open new paths for instruction. In the academic year 1998/99 one colleague compiled a phrasal dictionary from German newspaper articles on a variety of topics. A colleague from Austria used children's and youth literature as well as Austrian films as didactic materials. One seminar on the new culture of German film was rejected on the spot by the chair, as "there is nothing to be learnt there."

I dedicated a large part of my work in the faculty to the theme of 'intercultural comparison'. For the presentation of the German image abroad, good use was made of television news commentaries from *Deutsche Welle*, Cologne; these are mailed free of charge every two months to the faculty. It would be good to see this type of authentic, up-to-date material be put to greater use in instruction.

Another area of interest has been the analysis of the German image in the Czech press. Articles were translated focussing on sentence structure and morphology first, but also in order to expand the learners' vocabulary and to discuss the articles' content. It hardly needs to be mentioned that this frequently entailed supplying the students with historical background information. Yet, even for such more traditional aspects of *Landeskunde* or cultural studies, there are boundless resources to facilitate a lively kind of instruction: to name one example, *Internationes* provides excellent didactic material with slides for the presentation of German geography and history.

In these ways, attempts have been made to present a picture of modern Germany using the most authentic and newest materials available. This is imperative for a university-level instruction programme which prepares non-native teachers of German for their future task. It is clear that in this context *Landeskunde* cannot be confined to teaching, for example, the names of the 16 federal states and their capitals, their sizes and population, as well as geographic characteristics. Such teaching in no way conforms with a modern conception of studying a foreign language and culture.

## 6 Conclusion

It has often been stated that self-reflection is an integral component of intercultural learning. The intercultural learning process of the students at the University of Hradec Králové fell under two main areas of influence. One of them can be described as the social background, including the history of relations between the Czech Republic and Germany, and the prejudices arising from these, but also the individual experiences that the students had with foreigners at home and abroad. As regards the other area, it must be inquired which role the faculty of German plays in its task to lead the students to intercultural learning, and in stepping in to play a remedial role. The two areas, society and university, are rarely clearly distinguished in their effect on the students, because they influence and complement one another.

During the last ten years, the Czech Republic has seen many changes in the field of foreign language instruction. One problem – at least for the generation of current students of German – were the outdated textbooks used in instruction. In these, there was no intercultural connection to the country of the language's origin. Meanwhile, the textbooks have mostly been replaced by new ones, but the method of instruction is often still the same as in 1990. The traditional German image has improved over the last years, as the surveys of the students have illustrated – mostly due to the effect of personal experiences, which the young people have had in Germany. Thus the majority of their statements about the Germans were positive (about 67%). This shows that personal contact – be it through a stay abroad or through native-speaking teachers in the faculty – is enormously important for intercultural learning and cannot be replaced by any seminar at university.

I see the primary-school-style at university, which allows little space for individual preferences, as a major problem for intercultural learning. No consideration is paid to the students' interests, with all students having to complete the same compulsory curriculum. The officially decreed programme of instruction is so extensive that practically no time is left over for personal interests, e.g. in the fields of literature, culture and methodology. Foreign language teaching as such, and the subject area of cultural studies in particular, urgently require revision: the language as a system rather than an expression of culture is too much in the forefront of the seminars. Cultural studies are still oriented towards geographical and historical facts. The societal and political realities in the language's country of origin remain overlooked.

Due to decades of living largely isolated from the West, entirely unique auto-stereotypes have developed. Many Czechs, for example, see themselves as friendly and helpful towards foreigners; however, when young Czechs come to a Western country, they realise that other nationalities are often more open and more hospitable to foreigners than they are used to at home. This is the moment when new experiences are analysed in the context of one's own identity. The Czech Republic is a young nation still on the road to self-identification, which is ultimately the way to finding its place in Europe and the world. This tends to lead to a certain amount of insecurity and often to expressions of a feeling of inferiority – or of an exaggerated exhibition of one's own accomplishments and achievements. Both of these are hardly conceivable for Western Europeans and therefore very difficult to discern. It is therefore important for the Czech that they no longer see their German neighbours as a threat – and vice versa for tourists visiting the Czech Republic to show more sensitivity towards the smaller neighbour.

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# LINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: CZECH AND ENGLISH COMPARED

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*The article explores the difficulties that may arise in communication between native speakers of different languages (namely English and Czech), although they may be using English as the common language of communication. The aim is to show that the different systems of the respective native languages force the communicators to employ strategies of expression which are characteristic of one of the languages but not readily transferable into the other language. Moreover, the language systems often reflect even broadly conceived cultural differences, and affect the ways in which native speakers perceive and understand reality.*

## 1 Introduction

The relatively simple concept of communication between speakers of different languages as we have known it for years has been changing rapidly over the last decade or so. While until relatively recently it was believed that mastering the system of a foreign language at all linguistic levels was in itself a sufficient guarantee of successful communication, everyday reality seems to provide ample evidence for the contrary.

With the world getting smaller owing to a boom in information and communication technologies, and with travelling being easier than ever before, we become involved in interaction with speakers of sharply different native backgrounds, and although both parts might be using English (or any other shared language) as their means of communication, we encounter difficulties which do not arise strictly from poor knowledge of the language, but rather from the fact that each participant brings into the communication a different set of expectations, beliefs, attitudes, as well as social and communicative rituals. Put simply, conversations between two speakers of English about the same topic and following the same goals will vastly differ depending on whether the speakers are both English, or whether only one is a native speaker of English, and there will be huge differences even between pairs of non-native speakers of various nationalities.

These cultural differences may lead to miscommunication, or at least embarrassment, and often present problems which are hard to tackle. Whereas the description of a language as a system, however complicated, is something linguists have been trying to do for centuries, and the tools developed in the process have been refined to a high degree, there is no easy way of describing how exactly culture is reflected in language and communication. The reason lies in the fact that cultural phenomena penetrate all levels of language in a rather unsystematic manner, and it may seem that they are just a haphazard collection of idiosyncrasies and oddities. Yet there are, fortunately, enthusiasts who have embarked on the narrow and risky path of the study of these phenomena, and thus created a new field of research, which has come to be known as ‘intercultural communication’.

This is not to say that the awareness of culture-based conditioning of language is completely new: obviously, one has never expected a native Japanese or Chinese to use English in the same way as a native Englishman, Welshman or perhaps even a German. Cultural differences between Europe and Asia are known to be enormous, and communication differences are therefore a

logical implication; the trouble, of course, is that their concrete form remains unpredictable. What is much more surprising about intercultural communication is the discovery that these cultural differences come into play even in situations where the two respective cultures are relatively close (e.g. Great Britain and Germany), with the additional risk that the speakers might not even be aware of them precisely because of their subtlety.

It may be argued that any communication in which at least one of the speakers is using a language other than their own is an instance of intercultural communication. Such communications probably share certain features that are universal for all possible combinations of native languages, but the level of abstraction is inevitably too high as to be of any practical use for anybody apart from communication theoreticians. From a practitioner's point of view, it is much more important to examine concrete individual combinations of languages, and, possibly, draw conclusions that can be used in language learning and teaching.

The purpose of this article is to examine the relatively simplest question, namely how similarities or differences in the systems of two languages make communication easier or more difficult.[1] The languages in question are English and Czech, the point of view is that of a native speaker of Czech communicating in English with a native speaker of English. Where appropriate, references to other languages will be made.

## 2 English and Czech in contact

Let us start by considering the role of historical and geographical contacts of languages. It is probably safe to assume that nations living in close proximity have a better chance of influencing one another's lifestyles through contact and, possibly, intermarriage. It is even possible that in border regions the process of cultural amalgamation results in a common socio-cultural setting, where the native languages are preserved, but heavily influenced by one another, and where at least part of the population is bilingual. The situation in the area on the border of Bohemia, Bavaria and Upper Austria until World War II may serve as an example. Whether you call it *Šumava* or *Böhmerwald*, in many ways it was a true Euro-region – centuries before the term was coined.

On the other hand, World War II represents a point in history when contacts between the Czech and English started. Before then, such contacts had been extremely sparse for obvious geographical and political reasons (Czechoslovakia was traditionally France-oriented), and virtually restricted to linguistics, literature, film or personal encounters of a very limited number of speakers.[2] The boom of English, which was gaining ground after 1945 not only as a national language, but newly also as a means of international communication, was terminated abruptly in 1948, after the communist take-over. Although English remained one of the foreign languages taught in secondary schools, the number of learners of English was very limited, and the chances

[1] It has to be noted that different areas of comparison of the language systems pose problems of different magnitude and manifest different levels of predictability. While it is relatively easy to draw conclusions from differences in phonology, the differences in phraseology and idioms are virtually resistant to logical reasoning.

[2] Some notable exceptions must be mentioned here: owing to the growing popularity of sports like football, tennis, and some others, English sports terminology found its way into the vocabulary of Czech; the same is true about modern music.

to use the language in authentic face-to-face communication with native speakers were next to none. For this reason, from the 1950s almost till the end of the 1980s English in Czechoslovakia had an exotic air. It could be anything from a personal manifestation of resistance to the communist regime to mental exercise, but one thing it was definitely not is an instrument of natural communication. It is therefore not surprising that the natural gap between the two languages grew even wider.

This situation changed dramatically after 1989 with the opening of the country to the world, increased opportunity of travelling abroad, and last but not least, with the influx of young British and American people, many of whom started working as teachers of English and became, consciously or unconsciously, disseminators of their culture. The swing from East to West could not have been more complete, and initially it was welcomed by the population, tired of years of forced Russian influence. Using English expressions became a fashionable trend, especially among leading politicians and in the media, and under this influence even people who do not know any English use them liberally, often not knowing what they really mean. This is however probably a result of the current globalisation of the world, with English at the forefront as the language of global communication, rather than a purely American or British influence. Although this trend is not restricted to the Czech Republic alone, it is probably more prominent in the post-communist countries than in Western Europe. It may be concluded that the opportunity of encountering English in the Czech context has never been better than it is now.

## 3 Origin and typology

Both English and Czech are Indo-European languages, but English, although historically a cross-breed of Germanic and Romance languages, is considered a West Germanic language, while Czech is a West Slavic language.

The two are typologically as diverse as two Indo-European languages can be. English is a typical representative of analytical languages, whereas Czech is a synthetic language with extremely rich inflections. This has far-reaching implications for the structure of sentences in the two respective languages and for the status of words within sentences. In Czech, the role of words in the sentence can only be revealed from affixes attached to their roots or stems. The system of affixes is rather complicated, irregular, and each affix may be multifunctional, i.e. a single verbal ending may simultaneously convey the categories of person, number, gender, tense, aspect and mode, which stretches the learner's memory to the limit, and often beyond.

From the learner's point of view, English is initially much easier to learn than Czech: sentences are composed of words in the form of ready-made blocks that do not need to be shaped further. However, the initial feeling of ease will soon be replaced with the discovery that conveying the same meaning through English and Czech often requires completely different grammatical structures, and, in a way, a different way of thinking in and about the language. Thus, Czech learners of English experience different problems at different stages of learning, and it might be argued that the relative difficulty of English grows in direct proportion with growing levels of proficiency and the need to express fine subtleties of meaning.

This begs the question of whether relative similarity or dissimilarity of two languages is necessarily a facilitating or an aggravating factor respectively. Although the conclusion seems superficially logical, empirical evidence suggests a much more complicated picture. If we accept

that the learners' initial awareness of substantial differences between the two language systems can alert their attention and boost their motivation because of the increased challenge, then such learners may eventually be more successful than their colleagues learning a relatively similar language and therefore lacking the challenge. The dissimilarity of the two languages also limits the amount of transfer from the mother tongue into the foreign language and unwanted interference. On the other hand, while it is infinitely easier to communicate in a language similar to the speaker's mother tongue, achieving mastery may still be rather hard because many of the difficult points go unnoticed. Czech and Slovak provide a perfect example of this: although, strictly speaking, they are two different languages, they are probably closer to each other than some dialects of German. Consequently, everyday communication poses no problem, but translation from one language into the other, for example, is a rather treacherous task. Sadly, after the split of Czechoslovakia Slovak almost disappeared from the media in the Czech Republic and vice versa, which has considerably affected the youngest generation's capacity to understand the other language.

To make the picture even more complex, it has to be admitted that the absence of a particular category in one of the languages is usually an obstacle. If a particular category does not exist in the foreign language, the situation is usually easier because the speakers may just ignore it. However, there are instances where speakers may feel that there is something missing in what they say. If, on the other hand, there is a superfluous category in the foreign language, the learners usually do not have sufficient sensitivity to that particular feature. They are well aware of the problem but often unable to solve it. To illustrate what I have in mind, let me mention the absence of articles in Czech and the difficulty Czech learners of English have with the category of noun determination. I will refer to other examples in the following parts of this article.

## 4 Orthography and phonology

Spelling, or more precisely the very loose relationship between spelling and pronunciation, has traditionally been considered one of the most difficult aspects of English, especially for beginners. For historical reasons, English in its written form is very different from the spoken form, and the correspondences of graphemes and phonemes are only partly systematic, with frequent exceptions. A single grapheme or cluster of graphemes may have a number of different pronunciations and vice versa: different graphemes or clusters of graphemes may share the same pronunciation. This is especially true for vowel graphemes. A native speaker of Czech, where spelling is largely phonological with a few elements of morphological conditioning, and where the grapheme-phoneme relationship is therefore almost one-to-one, gets the impression that the spelling of English is a huge maze in which separate words must be learnt mechanically, one by one. In the more advanced stages of learning, the learner may feel encouraged by discovering certain regular correspondences, only to be disappointed on finding exceptions even to these. However, because of its complexity, training in spelling used to get (and to some extent still does) a lot of attention in teaching English in the Czech Republic and therefore, paradoxically, Czech learners of English often know its spelling better than native speakers. On the other hand, the massive use of word processing programs, complete with spell-checkers, has reduced the importance of knowing the spelling of each word. Whether this is a positive development still remains to be seen.

The sound of spoken English represents a difficult obstacle for a Czech learner in terms of both reception and production. The most easily noticeable difference is that the sets of phonemes of Czech and English only partly overlap. The most notoriously difficult English phonemes are probably [θ] and [ð], the most difficult Czech sound is the post-alveolar vibrant [r̝] (e.g. in the word *čtyři* 'four'), although it is in fact closer to English [r] than the Czech alveolar [ř].

Other differences in the quality of phonemes superficially identical in both languages are less noticeable to a Czech ear, yet pronouncing them in the Czech way imparts distinct foreignness to the speaker. To state a few examples: there are just five simple short vowel sounds in Czech and the same number of long vowels of identical timbre, whereas in English the system is much more complicated, and the short and long vowels show differences in quality, rather than just in length. The length of Czech vowels is constant (either short or long) regardless of the neighbouring phonemes, presence or absence of stress, etc., while the length of English vowels is variable. Every final voiced consonant in Czech is automatically assimilated towards its voiceless counterpart, while in English a final voiced consonant is preserved and results in the lengthening of the preceding vowel. The English velar nasal [ŋ] is a common allophone in Czech, but only in the medial position, and Czech speakers have difficulty in pronouncing it finally. There is no aspiration of [p], [t] and [k] in Czech, but once learners master it, they are sure to use it even where inappropriate, such as after [s].

I have interesting experience proving how Czechs encountering unfamiliar English phonemes seek analogies in the Czech phonemic set. For example, a native speaker of Czech who had never learnt any English, in trying to produce a phonetic transcription of an English song, marked every initial [ð] as [v]. This shows differences in what could be called the phonological sieve, i.e. an instrument sifting the numerous distinctive features of phonemes and letting through only those of the hearer's native language. It is not surprising that this sieve is set differently in different languages. In the example above, the features common to the two phonemes were their voicing and friction, while the different place of articulation was ignored as irrelevant. Indeed, if you were to grossly exaggerate the fricative character of Czech [v], you get something reminiscent of the English [ð].

English is a stress-timed language, whereas Czech is a syllable-timed language, where syllables have constant length and there is no compression of unstressed syllables. It is therefore not much of a surprise that Czech learners often complain that native speakers of English do not pronounce words 'properly', by which they mean the naturally reduced pronunciation of unstressed grammatical forms.

Unlike in English, in Czech the stress falls on the initial syllable and is not very prominent. The possibility of placing stress on virtually any English syllable, together with the practice of linking words into larger units and blurring word boundaries, makes decoding the message rather complicated even in situations where the listener knows all the individual words. Compared with, for example, German, where separate words stand out more distinctly, spoken English is much harder to understand.

Intonation patterns of Czech and English share certain common features, but there are also marked differences. Firstly, English exhibits a much wider range of intonation than Czech. Consequently, Czechs speaking English sound unemotional and disinterested; English speakers, on the other hand, especially female, sound unpleasantly over-emotional to the Czech ear. Secondly, while the falling intonation is common both in Czech and English, the rising tone is much more frequent in English, and the fall-rise and especially rise-fall are very rare in Czech. So from the English point of view, Czechs overuse the falling tone and employ it in situations where it is totally inappropriate in English (cf. the section on pragmatics below).

## 5 Morphology

It is beyond the scope of this article to analyse every single difference in morphology, and so only representative samples are treated. Interestingly but quite understandably, the meaning of the term 'morphology' itself varies enormously in Czech and English linguistics. In Czech, morphology is a substantial part of the description of the language owing to the diversity and number of paradigms. In English, where inflections are rare, morphology plays a much less important part, sometimes almost being reduced to word-formation. When linguists jokingly remark that there is nothing like morphology in English, this is actually not far from the truth. For these reasons, the limits of morphology in English are hard to specify; it largely depends on the point of view employed, and the borderline between morphology and syntax, or morphology and lexicology is by no means a rigid one.

The problem of noun determination has already been mentioned. Another, probably even more complex issue is that of English verbal tenses and aspect in relation to Czech. In Czech there are in fact only three grammatical tenses used, broadly speaking, for reference to past, present and future events. This relatively poor range of tenses is complemented with an elaborate system of verbal aspect[3], together providing a very fine tool for shaping the exact meaning of the verb. So verbs derived from a single Czech verbal root can express through affixation or alterations of the stem not only a single event vs. state, limited or unlimited action, but also beginning or termination, completion or incompletion of verbal action, repetition, frequency, as well as e.g. direction and some other modifications of meaning. The possibilities are virtually endless, the alterations are, however, morphologically rather irregular, and therefore almost impossible to master for a non-native speaker of Czech. Besides, the complex meaning is inherently present in the particular verb form and cannot be divorced from it. This means that Czech speakers of English feel the need to impart all these fine shades of meaning to English verbs, which is usually impossible, despite the wider range of verbal tenses in English and the simple/progressive, as well as perfective/non-perfective forms. Although the semantic character of certain verbs in English supports a particular interpretation (e.g. *kick* as a momentary verb, *change* as a process verb, etc.), generally speaking, the English verb is by nature more neutral in terms of its exact aspectual meaning, and sometimes these meanings are only made clear by syntactic devices, i.e. complementation of the verb by adverbials, singular or plural objects, etc. Here the two languages use very different tools to achieve the same communicative goals. A Czech learner of English struggling with English verbal tenses finds little consolation in the indisputable fact that an English person learning Czech faces even more acute complications, sometimes bordering on the impossible.[4]

## 6 Syntax

Syntax is the part of the language system where the differences between an inflected and non-inflected language are particularly salient. I shall focus my attention on three areas: the nominal

[3] It has to be stressed that the term *aspect* in Czech is not synonymous with *aspect* in English; to make this difference clear, the German term *Aktionsart* is sometimes used in Czech linguistics.

[4] Just to point out some other areas of difficulty, let me mention the system of modal verbs, prepositional phrases (which have to be learnt more or less by rote), or the phenomenon of conversion – something unheard of in Czech.

character of English, non-finite clauses, and word order, together with the related issue of information structuring, or topic-focus articulation.

It is a well-known fact that Czech resorts to more distinctly verbal ways of expression than English with its frequent nominal forms. To illustrate this, we can use a model structure of the *have a smoke*-type. Here the lexical meaning is carried by the noun, which is dynamic and therefore capable of expressing an action. The verb has lost its original lexical meaning and merely conveys the verbal categories of person, tense, etc., reminding of a copular verb in a transitive structure. Examples with other verbs could be *take a walk*, *give a call*, and others. The corresponding Czech structures are purely verbal.

Infinitive, participial and gerundial clauses as other examples of the largely nominal character of English are common structural means and standard alternatives to finite subordinate clauses, and sometimes they even represent the unmarked alternative (especially in the case of the gerund). Although these forms do exist in Czech, they are, with the exception of the infinitive, much rarer and stylistically different (the transgressive and the deverbal noun). This logically implies that it is advisable to translate English non-finite clauses into Czech as finite subordinate clauses. Yet, even very advanced learners of English apparently cannot resist the temptation to translate at least a few participial clauses as transgressives, which are on the point of extinction in modern Czech. It is amusing that more often than not they do not know the correct endings (singular masculine, feminine/neuter, or plural) of these forms and get them wrong. This is a good illustration of a situation when two languages formally possess the same means, which, however, occupy very different positions within the systems of these languages: one in the centre and the other on the periphery.

It is quite legitimate to claim that Czech has a free word order. The role of each word is signalled through the inflections regardless of its position within the sentence. With just a bit of exaggeration, we can argue that in short sentences of three to five words there are as many possible word order sequences as there are mathematical combinations, and each particular instance of word order has a context in which it is natural. The reason is that in Czech word order is the chief instrument enabling a linear distribution of communicative dynamism, i.e. sequencing the constituents of a sentence in such a way that the least important is in the initial position and the most important in the final position. Native speakers of Czech therefore have a highly developed sense of assessing the relative importance of each word/clause element simply because they have been doing this unconsciously all their lives.[5] Quite logically, they initially try to sequence constituents of English sentences along the same principles, which is impossible. In a non-inflected language the primary function of word order is to signal syntactic functions of sentence constituents, and so it has to be bound to some extent. Consequently, learners often go full circle and start to believe what they are told by the teacher: that the word order of English is absolutely rigid, following the notorious pattern of subject-verb-object-adverbial of manner-place-time. This is of course a gross simplification, although perhaps methodologically sound in the initial stages of learning, and overly rigid adherence to this principle produces sentences equally unacceptable, or at least unnatural, as those imitating the free word order of Czech. It usually takes years before Czech learners of English arrive at a reasonable point of compromise between the two extremes, and even then they cannot be absolutely sure.

Of course, English possesses tools compensating for the lack of freedom of word order, namely the intonation and indicators of contextual boundness or unboundness (articles *a*/*the*, pronouns *some*/*this*, *that*, *these*, *those*, etc.), but it takes practice to be able to notice and interpret these signals correctly. Since in Czech the intonation merely accompanies the linear distribution

[5] It is no wonder that the Brno school of functional sentence perspective, represented by Prof. Firbas, or the Prague group centred around Prof. Sgall and Prof. Hajičová have produced some of the most penetrating studies on the subject.

of communicative dynamism, the final intonation nucleus need not be very prominent. In English, on the other hand, it may be the only reliable indicator of the focus of information.[6]

## 7 Lexis

The comparison of the vocabularies of two languages is a risky business. Although the differences in the lexical units are probably the most apparent feature (many people still believe that the study of a foreign language is largely the study of its stock of words), it is at the same time the least systematic of all linguistic levels of analysis. The problems encountered by Czech learners of English will be unique in concrete individual instances, but at a higher level of abstraction they will be comparable to those experienced by speakers of other languages.

It may be argued that, owing to the nature of the language, the meaning of lexical units in Czech is more independent and more rigidly preserved than in English, where the meaning of a unit standing on its own is often less sharply contoured, and only becomes more precise in combination with another unit. This is well illustrated in the example of phrasal verbs.

Even though it is to be expected that the stocks of words of any two languages are by nature different, certain common grounds of most of the languages in Europe, and e.g. the influence of internationalisms from Latin or Greek, seem to offer welcome help in deciphering the meaning of at least some words. Similarities in the lexis are of course specifically related to a particular combination of languages. Superficial similarity, however, can often be misleading as in the case of so-called false friends, i.e. words of similar form, yet different in meaning. As the surface similarity of English and Czech vocabulary is rather low, these instances are not very numerous: *eventually* ('in the end') vs. *eventuálně* ('possibly, as another possibility'). Another problem is that there are words in English that have no satisfactory equivalents in Czech, e.g. *challenge*. Semantic fields of many seemingly corresponding lexical units only partly overlap, although in dictionaries they are treated as equivalents. There are unique historically and culturally conditioned expressions that virtually cannot be translated and have to be just approximated: consider the equivalents of *county*, *shire* and others in Czech or in other languages.

Additionally, there are substantial differences in the collocability of lexical units. A Czech speaker trying to transfer native patterns into English is bound to fail. More than in the case of e.g. Czech and German, it is absolutely necessary to learn words not in isolation, but rather in the form of complete short sequences, clusters, or phrases. If we find such considerable differences at the level of collocability, the differences in phraseology and idioms go even deeper. This is probably caused by lack of unifying factors and lack of contact of the two languages in the past. After a few failed attempts, a Czech learner of English usually gives up trying to translate phrases and idioms into English literally. Of course, there are collocations or idioms more or less identical in both these languages (some of them might be allusions to the Bible, which has been a unifying force in the past). But while a Czech learner of German is surprised at the relatively infrequent points of dissimilarity (despite the obvious differences we find striking analogies e.g. in verbal prefixes modifying the lexical meaning), an experienced Czech learner of English is shocked at discovering identical structures. I remember being surprised on coming across the phrase *it has dawned on me*, which is equivalent in meaning and motivation to its Czech

[6] Another example of compensation strategies in English is playing around with syntactic and semantic function of sentence constituents: e.g. instead of a thematic adverbial of place in the final position, it is possible to transform it into a locative subject, and so put it in the initial position (*It was hot in the room.* vs. *The room was hot.*).

counterpart. In most cases, however, phrases and idioms cannot be predicted or even accounted for. There is no reason why in English we say *fit as a fiddle*, and in Czech *fit as a fish*.

Another difficult area is that of the register and the stylistic value of lexical units. It must be amusing for native speakers of English to listen to foreigners who, unaware of the problem, in a single sentence mix expressions ranging from the archaic to the latest slang.

## 8 Pragmatics

Pragmatics is the area most proper for the study of intercultural communication. Although it is possible to create hypotheses based on the comparison of the two languages (as I have been trying to do in the present article), pragmatics represents a confrontation of the language and its users with concrete communicative situations in real-life settings. The more we study communicative situations, the more we discover the profound influence on meaning exerted by factors like the background knowledge, the expectations and social roles of the participants, as well as many others. Whole libraries have been written on the subject, and so all I can hope to do here is give a few representative examples.

I shall first go back to intonation, one of whose important functions is to convey attitudinal meaning and so provide a kind of paralinguistic commentary on how the listener should interpret what is being communicated through words and sentences. Unlike the simple account of the four basic tones in English, we are faced here with a virtually endless set of possible realisations, and we have to take into account intonation in the broad sense of the word, i.e. not just changes in pitch, but also tempo, pauses, loudness, key, quality of voice, and, in addition, paralinguistic means, such as gestures, facial expressions and body language in general (as long as there is a visual contact between the speaker and the hearer). It is quite obvious that a non-native speaker will often miss some of these important signals and so will not understand a joke, or trace elements of irony or contempt. And it is even more obvious that there cannot be any definitive textbook of these features of communication and therefore they have to be learnt the hard way – through personal experience.

Another function of intonation is that of marking the focus of information. Consider the following sequence:

A: *I'm going to buy a 'paper.*
B: (1) *You can have 'mine.* (2) *You can have 'my paper.* (3) *You can have my 'paper.*

A Czech speaker B, aware of the fixed order of English but unaware of the possibility to move the intonation nucleus from the final position usual in Czech (as described earlier), instead of using (1) or (2), is quite likely to end up with (3), totally puzzling the native speaker of English A.

Intonation is also a very powerful tool for governing the flow of discourse as it provides a particular kind of turnover and feedback signals. Czech speakers of English under-use it for these purposes or use it incorrectly. Let us consider the following utterances:

(1) *Ex↑cuse me.*
(2) *Ex↓cuse me.*

(1) is an attempt to initiate communication, whereas (2) is more likely to be an apology. Still, Czech speakers will probably employ (2) in both situations.

To make the picture complete, we shall reverse the situation and look at the possible responses a Czech speaker might give to (1):

(3) ↑*Yes*.
(4) ↓*Yes*.

While (3) is quite proper and indicates willingness to co-operate, (4) is misleading because of the mismatch of meanings conveyed through words and intonation. Yet, I dare say that (4) will be the Czech speaker's preferred choice.

To conclude the section on pragmatics, I shall present examples of the relationship between the linguistic form and its communicative function at the level of sentence-utterance. There are many instances of similarity. So *Have you got a cigarette?* will be correctly interpreted as a request, and *Will you have some more whisky?* as an offer. On the other hand, *Why don't you come round for a chat tonight?* is likely to be misinterpreted as a true question because this form of expressing invitation is not common in Czech. Of course, the listener will wonder why the speaker is asking in this manner; considering the topic of the visit has not been touched upon yet such a question is completely inappropriate.

The same problem is reflected in the difference in social rituals, e.g. greetings. A native speaker of English considers the question *How are you?* as no more than just a greeting, and knows that the response must invariably be something like *I'm fine, thanks*, regardless of the real feelings, and he or she also knows that it is a necessity to ask back for the sake of politeness. An inexperienced Czech speaker of English often interprets the same sequence as a true question motivated by the speaker's real interest in the other participant's well-being, and, consequently, provides an extensive account of all the illnesses, misfortunes and disasters he or she has gone through over the last decade or so.

It is quite clear that cultural differences do not only affect verbal communication, but also paralinguistic devices (just consider the range of language-specific interjections conveying emotional meaning, or the differences in imitating animal sounds in different languages), as well as strictly non-linguistic means of communication, such as gestures and body language in general, whose account could be almost endless. As one example for all, let me state just the gesture used when you wish somebody good luck, known in English as *crossing one's fingers*, which is a fitting description of what it looks like. In Czech (and in German) the same function is expressed through *holding one's thumbs for somebody*, which again is an accurate description of thumbs bent down towards palms and held firmly in clenched fists.

## 9 Conclusion

To end this article, I would like to pose a question whether even the concept itself of 'knowing' a foreign language is culturally bound or strictly individual. I have seen a number of Czech people communicate more or less successfully in a foreign language, while claiming all the time that their knowledge is extremely poor. On the other hand, I remember an American colleague of mine, who kept boasting about his excellent German. When I finally heard him speak what was supposed to be German, I confess I would not have recognised it as German

without being told so. I should add here that I am quite familiar with the sound of German, although I am not a very proficient speaker. This is not to hint that Czechs are inherently more modest whereas Americans tend to be more confident. Perhaps it is related to the situation of Czech, spoken by just over 10 million speakers in the Czech Republic and a few hundred thousand elsewhere as compared to English, spoken by hundreds of millions of people all over the world. The implication here is that speakers of languages like Czech have much more practice in learning foreign languages out of necessity, whereas for native speakers of English the motivation to learn another language is much less strong.

With all due respect for the findings of research into intercultural communication, which provided a penetrating insight into ways in which groups of people communicate, we should avoid the pitfall of over-generalisation and the dangerous tendency to prescribe rather than describe, and have to allow for individual differences. While trying to provide better understanding of the language, linguistic study should not result in levelling out the different possible ways of expression and, consequently, in uniformity of expression. Rather it should show users of the language limits within which they can safely operate, and for the bold ones provide opportunities to challenge even these limits.

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# II.

# TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE INTERCULTURAL CLASSROOM

# TEACHING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF ITS CULTURE

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*The article is based on the presumption that tolerance to other cultures can only be the result of education. It is shown that the foreign language class represents the most obvious means of promoting intercultural awareness. The text defines intercultural competence and explains what we need in order to become successful intercultural communicators. It states the aims of culture teaching, explains how learners come to terms with a new culture and presents various techniques and sources for training intercultural competence.*

## 1 Intercultural understanding: an essential educational objective

Erik Fosnes Hansen's bestselling novel *Choral am Ende der Reise* contains an episode in which a doctor takes his son for a walk through the woods. Discovering an ant hill, the father takes a branch and lets one single ant climb on it. He then carries it along till they come to a second ant hill. The father asks his son to watch very closely while he drops the foreign ant among the busy animals. Instantly there is a commotion in the ant community. A great number of the little animals attack the strange creature until, after a very short time, it is dead. The child is bewildered. The father looks at him and explains: "You see, it had a different smell about it."

This fictional scene drives home to us the fact that nature has not always pre-disposed the members of a given species to tolerance. Very often quite the opposite holds true. Individuals who look different, smell different or behave in a different way will be ostracized. No wonder that a similar tendency is also latent in the nature of humans. There seems to be an instinctive inclination in human communities to react in a hostile way towards intruders. Tolerance is not a virtue that is automatically innate in man. It has to be acquired. One way of reaching a tolerant attitude towards the members of other communities could be the experience of an immediate need to cooperate in a survival situation. Defaulting that, tolerance can only be the result of education.

Traditional educational theories considered 'enculturation' as one of the main objectives of education. The aim was to initiate the young child into the ways of thinking, feeling and behaving of the community in which it was growing up. In this way, conflicts could be reduced to a minimum, social relationship could be established and the survival of the community was secured. It may be one of the learning processes induced by the devastating wars and genocides in the past century that this traditional way of thinking in closed communities is now considered deficient.

At school, several subjects such as history, geography, music, art etc. have been concerned with acquainting the children with different aspects of the mainstream culture of their own country. Intercultural learning, however, is a different matter. Of course, the content of various courses can be re-shaped so as to make children aware of the fact that their own way of looking at the world may not be the only valid one. But the most obvious means of promoting intercultural awareness is certainly the foreign language class. Anyone learning a foreign language will sooner or later come face to face with cultural phenomena that look strange at first and will therefore evoke some kind of confrontation with one's own native culture.

## 1.1 Why teach culture in the foreign language classroom?

Culture has become a buzzword in English language teaching in recent years, and teaching culture has thus become a very fashionable concept in the field. On the other hand, it is not only fashion which has influenced the development of culture teaching. Experts, language teachers and language learners advocate the necessity to incorporate culture in language education.

Let us take a look at the reasons why this is so. Tomalin & Stempleski (1993: 5f.) see four main reasons for teaching culture:

- the rise in economic importance of the Pacific Rim countries
- the influence of increased immigration on curricula
- the study of pragmatics
- the study of non-verbal aspects of communication

Stern argues that it is not possible to teach a language without culture and that culture is the necessary context for language use (1992: 205). He believes that we should develop an awareness of our own culturally induced behaviour, an awareness of the culturally induced behaviour of others, and the ability to explain one's own cultural standpoints.

Tomalin & Stempleski see the goal in increasing awareness of and sensitivity to culturally different modes of behaviour. They put it this way:

> If learners of English are to communicate successfully on a personal level with individuals from English-speaking cultures, they need not only to recognize the different cultural patterns at work in the behaviour of people from the English-speaking countries; they also need to become aware of the ways in which their own cultural background influences their own behaviour, and to develop a tolerance for behaviour patterns which are different from their own. (1993: 82)

They add that communication, language and culture cannot be separated.

> Successful cross-cultural communication demands cultural fluency as well as linguistic fluency. In order to communicate effectively in English, students need more than just competence in English grammar and vocabulary. They must also have an awareness of the culturally determined patterns of verbal and non-verbal communication which speakers of English follow (for example how to begin, continue and end conversations), the styles of spoken and written language that are most appropriate for particular situations, and the non-verbal communication signals most commonly used in English-speaking cultures. (1993: 105)

## 1.2 Cultural fluency or cultural/intercultural competence

> Intercultural competence must be the development of a series of skills that addresses learners on their cognitive, affective and behavioural planes. It needs to equip people with awareness of difference, with ways of dealing with the possible shock of 'the other' and with strategies for coping with and understanding our affective reactions to such difference; it also needs to equip people with linguistic and cultural behaviour that will enhance their ability to communicate effectively with others. (Hyde 1998: 11)

> Cultural competence merges into communicative competence. What is commonly called communicative competence also implies many aspects of society and culture: forms of address, choices of register and style, differences in social and regional dialects, and the social values attached to these differences. It is not possible to achieve any of the proficiency goals without including certain aspects of sociocultural information. To a certain extent, however, cultural competence is distinct from communicative competence in that it points to mainly social and cultural behaviour and facts, and less

> to their linguistic manifestations: for example what table manners to be observed, whether or not it is expected that a visitor should give a present to the host, etc... (Stern 1992: 83)

Hyde explains that there are some very culturally influenced areas of language use (e.g. silence, topic choice, taboo, body language, turn-taking, back-channelling, politeness, etc.):

> Successful communication is not simply about acquiring a linguistic code: it is also about dealing with different cultural values reflected in language use. The modern English language teacher's job is to equip students for this aspect of communication. (1998: 11)

Why else do we need to become successful intercultural communicators? Tomalin & Stempleski say:

> To avoid being misunderstood and to gain self-confidence in interacting in English-speaking situations, students need to develop an understanding of the differences in communication styles between their own and English-speaking cultures. (1993: 105)

### 1.3 Cultural stereotypes

National and cultural stereotypes can play a very negative role in intercultural communication.

> Stereotypes limit our understanding of human behaviour and of intercultural discourse because they limit our view of human activity to just one or two salient dimensions and consider those to be the whole picture. (Scollon & Scollon 1995: 156)

One of the roles of culture teaching should be to teach students to assess critically cultural stereotypes which are presented to the students by their own society and in second language teaching. We can acquire cultural stereotypes even from TESOL textbooks as shown by Clarke & Clarke:

> In order to interact in the world with individuals or groups we all have implicit theories or schemata about those within or outside our own group. The generalisations we make enable us to function with others. Each new person we come into contact with will extend the framework for filtering our experience of the next person we meet. Images are also built up through other people's perceptions either through face-to-face interaction or through education and the media. This is why the TESOL textbook may be a powerful force in conveying these images, images which may be partial and reinforce stereotypes. (1990: 33)

On the other hand, stereotypes are not always negative; they help us to cope with the complexity of the reality surrounding us. Culture teaching should help us identify that we are dealing with stereotypes, not reality, enabling us to both assess them critically and overcome their limitations:

> Wherever and whenever teachers begin, young people have already acquired particular views of themselves and others. The development of stereotypes is a consequence of the need of any social group to establish its own identity and coherence by contrast to others. National and other ethnic stereotypes have two aspects: on the one hand the group defines itself by contrast of others and complemented by a positive autostereotypes of itself, and sometimes vice versa. On the other hand this corresponds to the individual's need to simplify in order to manage and cope with the complexity of new experience. (Byram & Zarate 1995: 16)

The authors voice the rather pessimistic idea that neither the learning of a foreign language nor the personal, direct experience of another country or community is sufficient on its own to

combat cultural difference. Even knowledge and personal experience may increase existing tendencies of rejection and withdrawal into a familiar identity and culture.

As educational optimists, however, we can close this section by saying that we believe that culture teaching can help to overcome prejudices and stereotypes which could prevent learners from coming to terms with the reality of the target culture.

### 1.4 The second language learner perspective

Culture can be viewed more objectively or from a more subjective perspective – that of the language learner and that of the native speaker. Stern (1992) points out that where the language is learnt as a foreign language the target community is usually physically and psychologically distant (e.g. English in China). In these cases culture teaching ensures that real people in real places use the target language as a normal means of communication. Culture teaching provides the context without which the language remains an empty code and lacks credibility from the learner's perspective.

Thinking of culture from the language learner perspective we will draw our attention to the ways in which learners come to terms with a new culture.

The process of acculturation was described e.g. by Brown (1994). The process will be different for the language learner in different situations:

- paying a short visit to the new country
- living in the host country as an immigrant
- living in a bilingual country learning the language of the other speech community.

Schumann (cited in Stern 1992: 216) distinguishes three typical strategies for how to cope with the new culture:

- assimilation – giving up one's own life-style and values and adopting those of the target group
- preservation – maintaining one's native life-style and rejecting those of the target group
- adaptation – attempting to preserve one's own life-style, while also adopting elements of the target culture in an attempt to become bicultural.

Different phases in cultural adjustment have been described. After the initial excitement comes culture shock. Gradually an individual recovers and accepts many features of the new culture while others continue to disturb him or her. This is culture stress. It gradually merges into the final stage when the learners accept the new culture depending on their assessment of themselves in relation to the new culture and the country of origin. At this fourth stage the learners display one of the three strategies described above.

These phases of cultural adaptation were illustrated by the participants of the intercultural seminar at Tejmlov as well as by my own [L.B.'s] learning history. As the discussions at Tejmlov showed, not all Czech students experienced the process of acculturation as they did not have the chance to live in an English-speaking country for a long period of time. Yet, some German students were willing to share with us the experience of culture shock. I myself have to admit that I have experienced all four stages of acculturation from the initial excitement after a short visit to Britain to a very depressive culture shock when I had to live in the country for a long period of time just on my own. I remember criticizing everything British and thinking that everything

Czech was absolutely wonderful. Finally, I was able to accept nearly all aspects of the new culture, looking with humour at those I did not. I was also able to see my own culture realistically.

Another culture shock came when I returned home after some time and was unable to relate the experience I had gained with the new culture to the people around me, who did not share my background. Later on, as a teacher trainee, I started wondering whether we were able to equip people (learners) with knowledge or skills which would help them to come to terms with the new culture before they actually get to the target country or whether the learners have to live through the process of acculturation on their own. There are many attempts to prepare the students for the new culture (e.g. pre-departure programmes for overseas student going to study at American universities). I myself believe that it is necessary to go through the process of acculturation, to experience the culture shock if we want to come to terms with the new culture, understand it, and try to become bi-cultural. On the other hand, when prepared in advance, the culture shock does not have to be as depressing as mine was.

Stern (1992) argues that these stages and strategies (of acculturation) cannot be fully controlled by teaching, but sensitive teaching can influence them. A teacher must make an assessment of the situation of the students, and of the purpose of language and culture learning, and on this basis help students approach the new culture.

One of the most important aims of culture teaching is to help the learner gain an understanding of the native speaker's perspective. Empathy plays a very important role, which here means the ability to look at different aspects of life the way they appear to members of the target language community. The learner should become as sensitive as possible to cultural issues, and the teacher should cultivate this awareness and support the development of their empathy: "It is important to be aware of the fact that learning a new culture implies affective learning." (Stern 1992: 219)

Alan Maley (in Tomalin & Stempleski 1993) summarizes the key concepts and aims of cultural teaching thus:

> More recent models [of language education] have tended to stress the behavioural aspects of culture, and in particular its role in communication (and communication breakdown). […] This book […] shows us how we might go about incorporating it into our teaching. […] [It] attempts to show that what we can do is to raise awareness of cultural factors. In so doing, we shall aim to sharpen observation, encourage critical thinking about cultural stereotypes, and develop tolerance. […] Cultural awareness-raising is an aspect of values education. As such it offers a welcome opportunity for transcending the often narrow limits of language teaching. (Tomalin & Stempleski 1993: 3)

## 2 Language learning as a highway to intercultural competence

If we consider foreign language teaching as the most powerful instrument for making children aware of other cultures beside their own, then it is our task to define just what exactly it is we are aiming at. Several helpful attempts have been made (cf. Melde 1987, Byram 1989) to describe the way in which the teaching of language and the teaching of culture may be made to interrelate with each other. The upshot of these treatments seems to be that foreign language teaching is to be considered as a multidimensional process in which linguistic and cultural components interact all the time. An individual lesson may put more stress on either of these two components, but it is hardly ever possible to isolate one component completely. In the end, the result of the learning

process is more than the mere skill of using foreign words and sentence structures to express one's thoughts; it is a complex personal qualification best called 'intercultural competence'.

The following remarks will concentrate on the cultural component of intercultural competence, i.e. on those aspects of culture which ought to form the content matter of foreign language teaching. It will soon become clear, of course, that these cultural aspects always comprise an element of language as well.

As a starting point, it is imperative to include a few reflections on the concept of culture itself. Considering the multiple contexts in which the term 'culture' is used and analysed, it is hardly surprising that no single definition has a chance to be accepted by everybody working in the field. However, there are several parameters in various definitions that indicate a degree of general agreement (cf. Hinnenkamp's 1994 bibliography). For the present purpose, the following three parameters may suffice to define the concept of culture:

(1) FACTS: When visiting a country as a tourist, the first things one notices are the unfamiliar look of the buildings and streets, the objects displayed in the shop windows, the notice boards and inscriptions. Later we notice that public transport needs getting used to, school life is different, you get different dishes for your meals etc. In short, the outward and social framework of everyday life is not identical to what we are used to.

(2) MEANINGS: Very soon we become aware that a lot of things (objects, institutions, festivals, rituals, novels, songs, even words) do not have the same meaning for us as they do for the members of another culture. A fireplace for example is an everyday feature of a British home; it stands for leisure time and family life. To most Germans, a fireplace conveys a different meaning: it expresses a back-to-nature attitude to life. The family living in the local manor house is regarded by most British people as a symbol of tradition and of local pride, whereas for most foreign visitors the manor house reeks of aristocratic haughtiness. Different values and meanings are thus attached to most phenomena of Anglo-Saxon culture, which members of another culture find difficult to identify with.

(3) BEHAVIOURS: Not only the outward framework of life is different, but people behave differently, too. In Britain, people queue at bus stations and in a hundred more places. They do not shake hands when you leave them for the night. They say their telephone numbers when they pick up the phone. They keep telling you about the weather. They have different ways of relaxing in their spare time, different eating habits, different ways of letting you know that they are happy or sad or that they like or dislike your company. Both their linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour appears peculiar at first sight.

Based on these three parameters of the concept of culture, we could define three educational objectives that constitute intercultural competence:

(1) being acquainted with cultural facts
(2) identifying with culture specific attitudes
(3) taking over culture specific ways of behaving.

Of course, these three objectives will in fact always merge into one another: taking over the habit of eating peanuts in the cinema implies some knowledge about the cultural field of 'public entertainment' as well as identifying with a rather relaxed, informal attitude connected with the social event of 'going to the cinema'. In spite of this interdependence, we shall here comment on the three objectives separately, in order to better view the kind of work they presuppose in the language teaching classroom.

## 2.1 Language teaching as a road to culture-specific information

There is hardly any activity in the foreign language classroom that does not carry a certain amount of information about the institutional, social and linguistic reality of the target culture. Yet, some learning tasks seem to be particularly conducive in conveying cultural information.

In the first place this applies to vocabulary work. Even if we accept only a very weak version of Sapir and Whorf's hypothesis on the relationship between thinking habits and language, it is quite obvious that a great number of English words stand for concepts that mirror culture-specific institutions, traditions, geographic or historical facts, etc. Even everyday words like *school*, *Christmas* or *beer* convey connotations that are different to what Germans or Czechs associate with these words. Considering the vast amount of cultural concepts represented by words, the learning of a language is a good means to give insight into the way in which the members of the target culture view the world.

Words acquire their meaning only in context. It is the verbal context that gives the learner clues for surrounding the new word with a network of associations congruous to that of native speakers. This is made easier if the new word is accompanied by a second type of context: the situational or visual context. It would be difficult to provide enough verbal context so as to furnish a learner with a fair idea of what a *stile* between two fields might be. Show him a picture of it, and he knows. Similarly, the meaning of the word *porridge* is best learnt by eating porridge. In this connection, it is hardly possible to overstress the importance of presenting authentic pictures and situations in the foreign language classroom. Particularly younger children are very quick in detecting those features in, say, an English picture book that are different from what they would have expected.

Beside concepts, it is facts that constitute the basis of our knowledge of the world. Facts are relationships between concepts, e.g.: November 5th is Guy Fawkes Day; the IRA is responsible for a great number of deaths in Northern Ireland; most British children attend a comprehensive school. The facts that are meaningful within the framework of one culture may be very different from the facts that hold true for another culture. In order to feel comfortable in a certain environment one needs to know a great number of facts concerning institutions, traditions, places, history, society, economy, technology, etc.

There are, of course, numerous sources that might supply the necessary cultural information. Ideally speaking, a prolonged stay in the country whose language is being learned would certainly be most effective. But as this will be the exception rather than the rule, the foreign language teacher is forced to look for information sources that are available everywhere. Later on, we shall review the most important of these resources in some detail.

## 2.2 Language teaching as a way of fostering culture-specific attitudes

Concepts and facts as such are independent of the person of the learner. And yet, everyone who is confronted with 'strange' concepts and facts from an unfamiliar culture will spontaneously take a certain attitude to them, ranging from like to dislike or from identification to rejection. This close relationship between information and evaluation has at least two causes:

(1) The learners, particularly the older learners, have already built up highly sophisticated systems of concepts within the framework of their own culture, and they know the facts that are meaningful and useful within that framework. They have felt comfortable with that knowledge for years and rather resent being confronted with new ways of looking at the world.

(2) The learners also have acquired a more or less consistent attitude towards a specific culture. As the native culture has been attaching meanings and values to all relevant aspects of life, it has also done so to a given foreign culture. It is part of present-day British culture to associate the German culture with qualities like grossness, lack of refinement, unfriendliness, etc. Every culture tends to instil into its members a generalised value pattern or stereotype of features pertaining to a given alien culture.

Considering these two facts together, one no longer wonders why people's attitude to other cultures, including even the cultures of European neighbours, is so often at the negative rather than at the positive end of the value scale. People just adopt the stereotyped attitude prevalent in their native culture and even reinforce this whenever they feel threatened in their familiar ways of looking at life and at the world.

Learners who cling to the stereotyped attitude prevalent in their own native culture will find it impossible to acquire any degree of competence in intercultural communication. Clearly they need to overcome the emotional barrier that prevents them from communicating with members of other cultural groups as equals. The question is how this can be done.

The first and most important step is the decision to probe and reconsider the prevalent stereotyped attitude concerning the target culture. Instead of being guided by a general widespread stereotype, the learners ought to develop their own individual view of what the target culture means to them. This implies a voluntary and conscious act of emancipation in the sense that the learners now let themselves be guided by their own insight and experience alone. The network of information, associations and values that the learners now gradually build up with regard to the target culture is what cognitive psychologists call a schema of the target culture.

As opposed to generalized stereotypes that tend to change very slowly, schemata are individual and dynamic in nature. They develop with every new information and experience.

Once the learners have become convinced that intercultural communication can only be effective if they step beyond the prevalent stereotyped view of the target culture, it is the task of the language classroom to create as many opportunities as possible to bring the learners in personal contact with various aspects of the target culture. Such cultural experiences might for instance be: exchanging views on a given topic with native speakers; watching authentic videos about a current issue; e-mailing; role plays; simulating culture-specific celebrations etc. The more the experience involves the learners personally, the better. Each of these experiences will enrich the existing schema of the target language and will not only add new shades of meaning but also modify previously held views about certain aspects of the culture.

Attempts have been made to trace the steps in which the attitude of a learner might develop in the course of time, given a steady flow of experiences with the target culture. Roughly speaking, we can postulate four stages:

STAGE 1: attitude of indifference
The learners have not yet become aware of the unsettling effect that the cultural difference between them and the people they have to deal with may have. They are still unconsciously certain that any views beside those conforming to their own culture are without any relevance.

STAGE 2: attitude of aggression
If the exposure to intercultural experiences continues, the learners will at some point become aware of the fact that differences are not just incidental, but that they form a screen beyond which people will insist on having their own strange ways and which causes no end of linguistic and behavioural problems. Result: an attitude of anger at every expression of the alien culture – an

attitude that is very often transferred to the people belonging to that culture and that may even lead to aggression.

STAGE 3: attitude of tolerance
Eventually, the learners get to know the variance between their own world view and that of people from outside their own culture. They accept this as a matter of course. At least implicitly, they do not consider their partners inferior to them because of their partners' belonging to a different culture.

STAGE 4: attitude of appreciation
The most advanced stage in the development of intercultural attitudes implies that the learners show personal interest in the various aspects of the target culture. They feel that being able to view the world under several different angles enriches their life.

The motor that causes the learners' progress from one stage of this emotional development to the next is the personal schema of the target culture. Once this schema has begun to evolve beyond the general stereotype pre-given by the native culture, it will accumulate experiences to every aspect of the target culture, some pleasant, others less so, but all of them seen as facets belonging to the same complex cultural system. The language classroom would be ill-advised if it tried to select only positive or only negative experiences. On the contrary: the learners ought to be confronted with very mixed experiences, in the same way as the members of the target culture are in real life. Thus, the learners will eventually be able to develop something like an insider view of the target culture, a stage when they can "feel like an Englishman", while at the same time being also able to still "feel like a German or a Czech".

## 2.3 Language teaching as a practising field of culture specific behaviour

Considering that the teaching of languages is no longer seen purely as an academic linguistic exercise, but as a process that leads to communicative competence and even beyond that to intercultural competence, the language classroom has to enable the students to passively and actively use language in intercultural communicative situations. The aim of language teaching is the training of verbal behaviour that is appropriate to the cultural context in which it takes place. This training is motivated and facilitated by an attitude that lies as close as possible to the appreciation stage described above, and it presupposes the knowledge of concepts and facts pertaining to the target language. Behaviour, notably verbal behaviour, is never entirely random; it is always shaped by cultural background.

Current research on intercultural communicative behaviour follows two different lines:

(1) We consider a specific type of situation and ask what speech acts the members of a given culture consider appropriate in that situation.

(2) We consider a specific speech act and ask in what way the members of a given culture tend to express it in words (and possibly by nonverbal means).

The first of these approaches to intercultural communicative behaviour is particularly complex. It tries to identify types of situation, using parameters like role, topic, place and time. Such types of situation might for instance be: business partners negotiating a deal; host welcoming a guest from abroad; small talk among friends during a meal, etc. These so-called frames are open in the sense that they leave the interlocutor with a wide range of possible speech

acts. And yet, there are definite cultural conventions and habits that make some of these speech acts compulsory, others unusual and still others facultative. In an English university lecture for instance, it is compulsory to include several jokes, and it is not usual to rub in one's own erudition by quoting from all kinds of sources. In a similar way, cultural conventions about what may and what must not be said or done during business transactions, talks during meals, etc. might be uncovered, thereby giving learners invaluable help in shaping their intercultural communicative behaviour. Some of this work is being attempted by discourse analysis. But as yet there is a long way to go.

Some frames may contain sequences of speech acts that follow very narrow culture specific conventions, like: calling a taxi; ordering a meal; asking the way in the street; answering the telephone, etc. These communicative rituals, often called scripts, leave the communicators with hardly any room for variation. Abandoning the fixed sequence, for instance by importing speech acts from the native culture or by over-elaborating on a speech act, would cause a lot of irritation. The competence of a learner to perform scripts as closely as possible to the conventions of the target culture is very often considered the touchstone of his or her intercultural competence.

The question of how speech acts are to be expressed within a given language-and-culture group is the classic field of research of pragmalinguistics. Particular attention has been paid to speech acts like: making suggestions, asking permission, apologising, etc. In many cases researchers found shades of meaning that differentiate between the expression of these speech acts in various cultural contexts. These shades of meaning, however, seem to be less the result of different 'cultural characters' than of mere linguistic habits. Czechs or Germans are no more and no less polite than Americans, but they have different linguistic habits in expressing their politeness. The snag is that merely translating the expression of a speech act from the native to the target language might cause irritation and even misunderstanding.

In addition to the actual words, accompanying features like the tone of voice, smiles, gestures, etc. are integral parts of the expression of a speech act. In this respect also, the mere transfer of habits from the native culture would disturb the harmonious flow of intercultural communication.

## 3 Techniques for training intercultural competence

### 3.1 Training situations

The interest in culture teaching in recent years has brought about a variety of teaching techniques. Stern (1992) differentiates between techniques suitable in three different situations:

(1) Culture teaching in foreign language courses in which the students are physically and often psychologically distant from the reality of life in the target speech community. Here culture teaching provides a background and context which brings the speech community to life and helps the students to "visualize and vicariously experience that reality." (1992: 23)

As the Tejmlov seminar was also concerned with the political aspects of intercultural communication, it should be mentioned that this was a typical situation of Czech learners before 1989. Though they were not geographically that far away, the political situation left them enormously remote from the reality of life of the target language community. As was pointed out at the seminar, in most cases English was learned not as a means of communication (as for ordinary people it was impossible to travel to any English-speaking countries) but the main motivation was to learn English in protest against the regime. Culture then became very

important for the learners as it was the only tie between the learners and the reality of life of the target language community. Again as shown at the seminar, culture was very often taught secretly without permission of the school officials.

(2) Culture teaching in courses in which the students may be physically distant from the target language environment but where psychologically it is much more real to them because they are preparing to visit the country for a holiday or to work there. This situation is that of most English language learners, and nowadays most Czech learners of English study the culture of the English language speaking community for these reasons.

(3) The third situation is that of students or immigrants already living or working in the target language environment. The aim of culture teaching is then to offer guidance, explain puzzling features or correcting errors of behaviour. As far as both German and Czech students are concerned, this is the situation when they become students at British or American universities, learn English in a target country or work there, e.g. as au-pairs.

According to Stern, apart from these three possible situations in which culture is taught there are other factors which are important to be considered when we want to choose an appropriate technique of culture teaching. These are age, maturity and educational level of the students.

Presumably we could add to this list personal interests and life experience connected especially with travelling abroad.

### 3.2 Training techniques

Stern (1992) makes a distinction between eight different approaches, or techniques, to culture teaching.

(1) CREATING AN AUTHENTIC CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT:

e.g. decorations and displays of all kinds – posters, maps, newspaper and magazines, realia including things like theatre tickets, underground tickets, timetables, restaurant menus, etc. From personal experience it can be said that such objects are very much appreciated in a setting where the target language community is far removed from the reality of the students' life and where the teacher is usually the only 'representative' of the target language community, even though he or she is not a native speaker.

(2) PROVIDING CULTURAL INFORMATION:

The aim is to inform the language class of cultural facts, drawing their attention to a comparison of the native and the target culture. This is also known as the "slice of life" technique, consisting of a short attention-getting input, e.g. a popular song, an interesting poem or a short magazine article.

One of the best-exploited techniques is the culture capsule, which is an isolated item of information on an aspect of the target culture. The verbal presentation of the teacher should be accompanied by realia, visuals, etc., especially with younger learners. Work with such a capsule should not take more than ten minutes of lesson time and the instigators of that technique (Taylor and Sorenson) suggest using the culture capsule once a week. The idea of culture capsules was further developed into culture clusters, which represent a combination of topic or concept-related culture capsules. For example, if we have a culture cluster on celebrating Christmas, there would be a culture capsule on the Christmas tree, another on typical Christmas food (e.g. how to make Christmas pudding), etc. The authors then recommend concluding the cluster by some sort of activity, e.g. a role-play or simulation.

The question is whether the cultural information should be transmitted to the students in the target language or in their mother tongue. With more advanced students, obviously, culture is taught through language, language through culture. With young learners it is advisable to deal with the cultural information in the mother tongue. For them, talking about the target culture in the mother tongue offers a necessary relaxation. Cultural information provided in the mother tongue is thus available even to weak learners whose grasp of the target language is not sufficient for getting the cultural message across. For weak students, knowing about culture can represent strong motivation for learning the language sometime in the future when the current weaknesses can be compensated for by other strengths.

(3) CULTURAL PROBLEM SOLVING:

In this approach the students are not only presented with cultural information but are "confronted with a culturally significant situation which may present a problem to a foreigner visiting the country" (Stern 1992: 226). Other authors refer to this technique as culture assimilators, critical incidents or simply case studies. The activity can be approached as a multiple choice exercise in which the student is provided with a range of possible solutions, asked to choose the right one and given feedback afterwards, for example:

> Addressing the teacher
>
> Read the situation below, and choose the best answers to the questions. Sometimes more than one answer is possible.
>
> It was the first day of the English class and the teacher was introducing himself. He wrote his full name, Alan Jones, on the board and said, 'My name is Alan Jones. If you like, you can use "Mr" with my name. Now I'd like you to tell me your names. Let's start with you,' he said, indicating a young woman in the front row. The young woman answered, 'My name is Lilian Castro, but you can call me Lily, Teacher.' Then the teacher said, 'OK. I'll call you Lily, but please don't call me "Teacher". Please call me Alan or Mr Jones.'
> Lily looked confused, but the teacher ignored her and continued to ask the students to introduce themselves.
>
> 1 Why did Lilian call Alan Jones 'Teacher'?
>  a. She didn't know his name.
>  b. She was trying to show respect.
>  c. She couldn't pronounce his name.
>  d. She felt confused.
>
> 2 Why did Alan Jones ask Lilian not to call him 'Teacher'?
>  a. He didn't really like being a teacher.
>  b. He wanted to be friendly.
>  c. In his country, only very young pupils call their teacher 'Teacher'.
>  d. He thought Lilian was being rude.
>
> (Tomalin & Stempleski 1993: 86)

The following example illustrates the use of cultural assimilators:

> Social behaviour
>
> Work with a partner. Imagine that the situations below take place in an English-speaking country. What would you do in each situation? In some cases, more than one answer is possible.
>
> 1 You've been having digestive problems for a week, and have just started to feel better. You meet a British friend at a party. Your friend says, 'How are you?' What would you do?
>  a. Start talking in detail about your problem.
>  b. Say, 'Fine, thanks. How are you?'

c. Say, 'Not bad, thanks. How are you?'
d. Nothing.

2 You're visiting an American friend in her new apartment. You like the apartment and you want your friend to know. What would you do?
a. Say, 'Your apartment is nice. How much is the rent?'
b. Say, 'Gee, this place is really nice.'
c. Say, 'I really like your apartment.'
d. Say nothing, but show that you are interested by walking around, looking at everything in the apartment, and picking up everything that is movable.

(Tomalin & Stempleski 1993: 90)

(4) BEHAVIOURAL AND AFFECTIVE ASPECTS:

Behavioural and affective training can be achieved by the audio-motor-unit, which is an application of Total Physical Response to a culturally significant series of actions, e.g. behaving in a restaurant (cf. Lafayette 1978). The teacher gives commands and the learners perform the action. This technique could be successfully used especially with young learners.

(5) DRAMATISATIONS:

This technique again could be used successfully with young learners training them in routinised basic language functions like greetings, polite requests, getting things done, etc. The dramatization can be followed by an explanation or discussion; little children can use puppets for the dramatization. The advantage of this technique is that it calls for the use of meaningful language.

Students do not have to devise the dramatisation themselves but the teacher can use a video scene of everyday life illustrating culturally significant behaviour (mini-drama). The action is interrupted and discussed by the students. An advantage of mini-dramas is that the students can also get involved emotionally and identify with a character in the episode.

Role-plays and simulations require a high level of language proficiency for the students to be able to solve problems and thus are suitable for advanced learners. An example of a cross-cultural role-play is provided below. Its aim is to increase awareness of the types of misunderstanding that can occur between people of different cultures.

Prepare a brief description of an incident that happened to you and that led to a cross-cultural misunderstanding.

1 Explain to the students that, at one time or another, most of us have been involved in situations that have led to cross-cultural misunderstanding. To make sure that the students understand what you mean, and to encourage recall of similar incidents in the students' own experience, describe a cross-cultural incident in which you were involved. For example, one of the authors of this book was staying overnight for the first time with a Japanese family. After dinner, she and her hosts sat in the living room and discussed a variety of things: the family's trips abroad, things the guest should be sure to see while in Japan, etc. As the night wore on, the hosts politely and repeatedly asked if she wanted to take her bath. The guest replied that she was in no hurry and could wait until later. What she failed to realize at the time was that her hosts were hinting that it was bedtime, and that she - the guest - should take her bath first, so that the family members could then take theirs and retire.

2 Divide the class into groups of three or four. Students take turns to describe cross-cultural incidents in which they were involved.

3 Each group selects one of the incidents described. Together they plan how to dramatize the incident. It is important that the student involved in the original incident should not play his or her own part.

4 Groups take turns to perform their role-plays in front of the class. The other students try to guess which student was actually involved in the incident.

5 The whole class discusses each incident and its cross-cultural implications. Instead of describing cross-cultural incidents to their group, individual students can write up incidents that happened to them, and place their descriptions in a box. Small groups of students can draw an incident from the box and act it out. This can then be followed by a whole-class discussion.

(Tomalin & Stempleski 1993: 88)

(6) COGNITIVE APPROACHES:

There are always students who prefer systematic study of culture through reading, lectures or discussion. These students are typically academically oriented adults with features of introversion.

In connection with cognitive approaches Damen (1987) describes so-called area-specific studies in which students must uncover the information by means of using library resources, making surveys, searching through the internet, etc. Similar techniques are widely used in the shape of large scale projects.

(7) EXPLOITING LITERATURE:

In the Czech Republic there is a very strong tradition to learn about culture from fiction. For many years in the past, literature represented the only authentic source of culture as there was no access to Western media. People read a lot, they love literature and they perceive the British Council as an organization whose responsibility would be to provide them with authentic literary texts. Unfortunately, the Council sees itself more in the position of adviser in the sphere of English language teaching which is more closely represented by methodology than anything else. On the other hand, there can be seen a slight shift in recent years.

Some authors see a danger in using literature for informing about culture, especially in that a particular literary text can represent the cultural norms of a hundred years ago. The truth is that this is often the case. Many Czech people see the British culture through the prism of *Three Men in a Boat* by Jerome Klapka Jerome or other popular books of that time. But it is a job for us language teachers to choose authentic, contemporary literary texts, the language of which could become part of the students' active language use and a valuable source of cultural information.

Exploiting up-to-date literature is shown with a passage from the novel *Trainspotting* by Irvine Welsh:

- Awright, Nina?
- Aye. It's a shame aboot Uncle Andy.
- Aye. Whit kin ye say? Geoff shrugged his shoulders. He was twenty-one and Nina thought that was ancient.
- So when dae ye finish the school? he asked her.
- Next year. Ah wanted tae go now but ma Ma hassled us tae stey.
- Takin O grades?
- Aye.
- Which yins?
- English, Maths, Arithmetic, Art, Accounts, Physics, Modern Studies.
- Gaunnae pass them.
- Aye. It's no that hard. Cept Maths.
- Then whit?
- Git a job. Or git oan a scheme.
- No gaunnae stey oan a take Highers?
- Naw.
- Ye should. You could go tae University.
- Whit fir?

Geoff had to think for a while. He had recently graduated with a degree in English Literature and was on the dole. So were most of his fellow graduates. – It's a good social life, he said…

(Welsh 1994: 38)

Some students have seen the film or know the soundtrack and are keen to look into the book itself. The extract illustrates linguistic diversity within Britain, can serve as a starting point for the study of the British school system/systems (O-Grades and Highers in Scotland as opposed to GCSEs and A-levels in England), touches poignantly on the problem of unemployment and can also initiate a discussion on relationships, family reunions, and funeral rituals. As it is a conversation between two young people, it captures the interest of secondary school students who, by reading and processing it, can get a glimpse into the world of some of their contemporaries in Britain today while being warned about the dangers of generalization (cf. Hos 1998).

(8) REAL-LIFE EXPOSURE TO THE TARGET CULTURE:

This approach means taking students into the target language environment. It has become very popular in the Czech Republic in recent years to take the students for a week's trip to Britain as an optional part of the English language syllabus in both primary and secondary schools. Such trips raise the students' motivation immensely as they live in British families and have a chance to practise the language they have learned in an English-speaking environment. They gain a first-hand experience of the culture of the target community, usually have a chance to travel and see the well-known sights and also have a chance to attend some classes in a British school and experience the system of education they learned about at home in real life.

Another possibility, much less expensive, is bringing a native speaker into the language classroom. The students can discuss various cultural and other issues with the native visitor, depending on their interest and language proficiency.

The students can also meet foreign visitors in the street, interview them, inform them about their own culture and learn from them. Even projects can be based on such interviewing, e.g. students asking tourists in the streets why they are visiting their country, what experiences they had, what they liked, what they did not, etc. Thanks to such projects the students can see their own culture through the eyes of the foreign visitors and make changes in the schemata they have about themselves and their own culture.

One more possibility of exploiting real contacts with the target community is having pen-pals. This was extremely popular in the Czech Republic when real contacts were not possible. Even whole classes can be in regular contact with other classes abroad, informing them and getting information on what is going on in their school life.

In connection with techniques of culture teaching, Damen (1987) introduces the 'contrastive approach', which means systematic examination of the contrastive qualities of two cultural groups. She believes that the contrastive approach should be a part of each language lesson. I think that learning a different culture always means making comparisons with one's own as understanding involves comparison. On the other hand, it may not be necessary to look for aspects which differ in the two cultures but rather look for similar features.

The importance of raising cultural awareness has already been stressed above. Damen presents cultural self-awareness techniques which are designed

> to bring to a conscious level personal assumptions, values and attitudes affecting intercultural interaction. These may involve sensitivity exercises, self-assessment questionnaires, or problem solving. They are designed to increase cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity. This technique is suitable for advanced language learners. (1987: 287)

This type of training may also focus on the development of personal self-discovery, it can also raise empathy, which has already been named as a very important aspect of culture learning.

A very good source of such culture awareness techniques can be found in Gaston (1984). An example of such a technique applied to an authentic newspaper article is provided below.

**Trip to Turkish Delight ends in Torquay by Night**

It is a mistake anyone could make at night in a foreign country. Kumiko Tsuchida, a Japanese tourist, arrived at midnight in a seaside town on the Devon coast and thought she had landed in the cradle of European civilisation 2,000 miles away. She wanted to go to Turkey. She ended up in Torquay. And at first glance she could not tell the difference. The trouble began earlier in the evening when she had asked at Reading how to get to Turkey, where she recently moved with her family. Mrs Tsuchida, aged 40, who speaks very little English and with a strong accent, was misunderstood and instead of being directed to Heathrow was ushered on to the 8.15 train to Torquay, which arrived at around midnight. By the time the police found her it was two in the morning. They called in social services, who put her up for the night in a nearby old people's home.

"She told officers in broken English that she had been on the train so long, she genuinely believed she was in Turkey already. She even thought she had been through the Channel tunnel," police said. A social services spokesman said: "Our out-of-hours team received a call from the police at 2am to say they had a lost and exhausted lady from Japan who needed a bed for the night. We had a bed available and were happy to oblige."

Yesterday morning a care assistant took her to Thomas Cook in Torquay where manager Claire Gibbs took over. She said last night: "Mrs Tsuchida was very frightened and could hardly speak any English, so we had to talk to her via the Japanese embassy in London." Finally, the embassy arranged for Mrs Tsuchida, who had been staying with a friend while on a short holiday in this country, to be put back on a train to Reading where arrangements were made for someone to meet her and take her back to Heathrow to catch a plane to Istanbul.

Activities

Set A:

1 Read the text through quickly. What are your immediate feelings and reactions to the story?
2 When you have been speaking a foreign language, has anything similar happened to you as happened to Mrs. Tsuchida?

Discuss with a partner

Set B:

1 In lines 24/5, it says that Mrs. Tsuchida 'speaks very little English', 'with a strong accent'. What do you understand by these two phrases? What do you think of people who speak English with 'very strong accents'?
2 In line 38, the police are reported as having said she spoke 'broken English'. a. What exactly do you think she said to the police in Torquay when she met them? b. What is your understanding of the term 'broken English'? What do you think about the term?

Discuss your responses in a small group

Set C:

1 Write down the phonetic transcription of 'Turkey' and 'Torquay'. What is the stress pattern of each word?
2 How do you think these differences contributed to the misunderstandings reported in the story?

Discuss your answers in a small group

Set D

1 What are the implications of this story for English teachers? What, for you, are the most significant language-related issues raised by the text?
2 How would you set about trying to help Mrs. Tsuchida improve her English?
3 How would you help British Rail and the Police address some of the language issues raised by the story?

(Wright 1997)

Damen also describes a technique referred to as 'language and culture connections', and she points out that it is crucial to make connections between language and culture in every language classroom. Authentic texts are a priceless source of both linguistic and cultural information. Damen sees making cultural connections especially important in vocabulary development. It is concerned with the establishment of the connotative aspects of lexical items, use of terms and their evaluation in the native culture. It can be applied on proverbs, sayings, metaphors and humour, as they all involve language and carry heavy cultural connotations.

This strategy means that the teacher always needs to be aware of cultural implications, ready to supply explanation or guidance when needed. This comment made by Damen raises the question of whether it is possible for a non-native teacher of English to teach the target language culture which is not his or her own. In many cases, as has been said, the English teacher is the only representative of the target culture for the students. This is especially true about primary schools, where there are very few native speaker teachers. The situation is much better at secondary schools especially in bigger cities. In some places there is usually even an English-speaking community, which represents a very valuable source of cultural information.

In any case culture cannot be dealt with only by the native-speaker teachers in the schools, as they are in the minority. The textbooks used in Czech schools (usually British) are loaded with cultural information. (There were attempts to exclude culture totally from textbooks under the communist regime, as was shown at the Tejmlov seminar. Such attempts had a very deteriorating effect on the language level of the students as well, not only on their knowledge of culture, as the language, being deprived of the cultural information, lacked authenticity.)

We cannot assume that the teacher can understand everything concerning the target culture; this is not possible. Even native speakers do not necessarily understand every aspect of their own culture, as they have different socio-economic backgrounds. It is very important for teacher education that future teachers should learn how to observe culture, how to reflect on their experience, and how to use various sources for transmitting cultural information. Of course, every teacher would claim that the most important way of learning culture is living in the target language community, absorbing the culture, gaining first hand experience. This is definitely true but it should be stressed that even short visits which do not mean much to the language development of the teachers are a very valuable source of cultural information.

To summarize this section on techniques of culture teaching, here are some basic teaching principles which should be followed when teaching culture (cf. Tomalin & Stempleski 1993):

- Access the culture through the language being taught.
- Make the study of cultural behaviour an integral part of every lesson.
- Aim for students to achieve the socio-economic competence which they feel they need.
- Aim for all levels to achieve cross-cultural understanding-awareness of their own culture, as well as of the target language.
- Recognize that not all teaching about culture implies behavioural change, but mainly an awareness and tolerance of the cultural influences affecting one's own behaviour and the behaviour of others.

To achieve the goals of culture education the authors advocate an approach which is task-oriented and cooperative. It means that to accomplish the task

- the students work together in pairs or small groups to gather information,
- share and discuss what they have discovered, in order to form a more detailed picture, and

- interpret the information within the context of the target culture and in comparison with their own culture.

As far as materials for culture teaching are concerned, Tomalin & Stempleski's *Cultural Awareness* may be recommended. It is an excellent resource book for culture teaching activities meant for teachers who want to increase cultural awareness among their students. The book contains 75 activities for use with students at any level of language ability, from elementary to advanced.

## 4 Resources for training intercultural competence

For the overwhelming majority of German and Czech students, foreign language learning takes place at school in their home town or village. If they are to acquire intercultural competence in spite of not being directly immersed in the target culture, we have to find sources of information and possibilities of cultural contacts that are available everywhere. The following review tries to list the most important of them.

### 4.1 Books

As early as the 18th century, various works of English literature were presented to German and Czech students. Although their central themes were human nature in general, the analysis of those texts also included biographies of the authors, the circumstances of publication of their work and the historical, social and cultural context in which they were set. While reading such a fictional text, the students collected information about the target culture in a rather indirect and unsystematic way. As present-day literature tends to concentrate more on social problems, it naturally conveys more cultural background information than texts by Shakespeare or Milton did.

At the beginning of the 20th century, extracts from non-fictional books dealt with geographic descriptions (e.g. Dickens, Irving), history (e.g. Dickens, Scott, Carlyle, Macaulay) or philosophical essays (e.g. Pope, Ruskin).

The most significant development took place at the end of the 19th century, when a great number of textbooks were published that contained both fictional and non-fictional texts with topics taken from family and school life in Britain, but also with geographical, biographic and historical information. Since that time, students have been presented with facts about the Anglo-Saxon cultural world from the beginning of their English courses. At advanced level, more or less elaborate collections of text extracts have been compiled.

### 4.2 Documents of popular culture

Foreign language teachers often feel that the students' interest in the target culture can best be aroused if they are provided with up-to-date information on topics that happen to be popular with teenagers at the very moment. Beside newspaper clippings, this includes young people's magazines, videos, TV-programmes and music discs. As compared with books, these documents have not been processed by educationists, but teachers hope to be able to mirror the feelings, the

preoccupations and the problems of the contemporary young generation in the target culture more immediately than if these were first passed through the filter of a textbook.

### 4.3 Persons representing the target culture

The development of transport systems and the opening of borders in Europe have contributed to the fact that there is hardly a town or village now in which it is not possible to find native speakers of English. They constitute an invaluable potential source of cultural information, provided they can be motivated to cooperate from time to time, either by coming to school or by consenting to be interviewed by students at home.

No less important as a source of cultural information are the English teachers themselves. The more they keep in contact with the target culture through visits, media and personal friendship, the easier it will be for them to pass on to their students information, to let them participate in intercultural experiences and to encourage them to train culture specific behaviour.

### 4.4 New media

The possibilities of intercultural work that lie in the new media are still not recognized and used as much as they deserve. Partly because of deficiencies in the availability of hardware, partly because teachers are still uncertain about how to handle the new media in class, the potential slumbering in computers has only been probed by few language teachers. From the point of view of intercultural work, it is particularly the use of CD-ROM that supplies a wealth of factual information about a wide range of topics relevant to the target culture. If used judiciously, selected website addresses will also enable the students to enlarge their information basis on current topics pertaining to the Anglo-Saxon world.

Particular mention must be made of e-mail contacts that connect young people as individuals and as groups with peers throughout the world. In the language classroom, these e-mail contacts might be guided to the purpose of exchanging views on selected cultural issues, thus initiating personal intercultural experiences of a particularly impressive kind.

It is hardly possible to determine how strong an impact each of these information sources will have. Generally speaking, the aim is to involve the learner as intensely as possible. It is widely believed that this is most successfully done by presenting information or experience centred around people in the context of the target culture struggling with certain aspects of life. Very often, fictional texts are particularly well suited to this purpose.

Probably even more important than the information sources themselves are the tasks that are attached to them. They predetermine the kind of effect the teachers or textbooks expect. The present classroom practice is best reflected in the tasks contained in the various textbooks at beginner, intermediate and advanced levels. A glance at some of these materials shows that the three major aims of intercultural work described above are not evenly balanced in the concrete classroom work.

The surface information contained in texts seems to be the topmost preoccupation of the authors of so-called comprehension questions. The work-sheet attached to a text on ‘Kings of Pop’, for instance, contains the following questions:

- What reasons are given for the fact that pop music is ‘in’ with young people?

- Why has pop music become so widespread?
- How did the Beatles become popular?
- What was distinctive about the Beatles sound?
- Tell us in about 6-8 sentences how the Beatles were discovered.

Quite obviously, intercultural work is here confined to making sure that the students know some facts about one particular aspect of British culture. No effort is made to provoke any sort of emotional or behavioural reaction on the side of the learners.

Tasks that initiate critical reflection on a given aspect of culture are much less frequent than pure questions about facts. Following a text about 'Sexism in Language', for instance, a textbook asks: "Do you agree with the author that it is important to change such sexist language or don't you think it matters?" Having been given examples of sexist language in English, the students will be very likely to compare these with examples of similar language in their mother tongue. In all probability this will lead to the impression that the British are just as sensitive to the problem of the equality of sexes as people in the native culture are. This may be considered a contribution to the development of the personal schema of British culture.

As for eliciting intercultural communicative behaviour on the part of the students, the textbooks hardly ever take this last step, although many texts would even suggest it. A text on 'Problem Pages', for instance, could logically lead to the task of answering a problem letter in the role of a psychological expert, or a text on 'Teenagers Talking' could be wound up with an attempt at writing and acting out a short scene among teenagers. As it is behaviour that requires a maximum of involvement on the part of the students, this ought to be a very frequent task in the service of intercultural competence.

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# COGNITIVE AND PEDAGOGICAL ELEMENTS OF DEALING WITH INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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> A female German student is working as an au pair girl in an English family and wants to improve her English. She and her host mother have just returned from doing the shopping. The things they have bought are on the kitchen table and by pointing to a tin of coffee the student asks: "Will you put it in the cupboard?" Completely to her surprise her host mother gets very angry: "Who do you think you are, bullying me around like this. To make one thing quite clear from the start, my dear..." (Beneke 1975: 353)

It is episodes like this which serve to illustrate problems that can occur in the interaction between members of different cultures with different linguistic systems. The field of intercultural communication revolves around difficulties and misunderstandings which arise in contact situations such as the one cited above. In the face of 'European integration', 'internationalisation' and 'globalisation', intercultural contact is on the increase, be it in the domain of politics, academia or economy, increasing the necessity of coming to terms with problems of intercultural communication.
Starting out from a short glance at what the notions of 'culture' and 'communication' entail, in this article I will explore some of the conditions of intercultural communication, as well as the EFL classroom.

## 1 Fundamental concepts

### 1.1 The notion of 'culture'

'Culture' is by no means an unambiguous and precise term. E. B. Taylor, a 19th-century ethnologist, coined an early definition that addresses the complexity of culture: he sees culture as "knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (1871 in Nagels 1996: 6). Today, in an anthropological conception of culture, e.g. the one by Goodenough (cf. Byram 1989: 43), culture is not so much considered to be concerned with externally observable elements, but as something that refers to a set of knowledge within a system of ideas. Observable phenomena are perceived and organised by means of the knowledge shared by the members of a cultural system. On the one hand, culture is a *product* of experiences that are gained and handed down from generation to generation. Yet on the other hand, culture is a *producer*: it functions as a mechanism people use to categorise and interpret their environment and other people's behaviour. This knowledge enables the members of a cultural system to act adequately within this system – and to communicate. Culture and communication function within a relationship of mutual dependence. This definition draws on the idea of a homogeneous and heterogeneous understanding of culture. The knowledge referred to above seems to be part of a homogeneous store which is shared by all members of the cultural system and which serves to distinguish them from other cultures. As far as communication is concerned, however, 'intra-cultural' disruption or misunderstandings between members of one cultural system may also occur.

In order to overcome the criticism of being too static a concept, the cognitive approach to culture has developed into a symbolic one, as for example Geertz's. He associates culture mainly with 'meaning'. First, the people within a cultural system create and organise the cultural process,

but they also use it to define themselves. Human beings organise their environment by ascribing meaning to it and finding interpretations of it, thus creating symbols. According to this conception, language, too, is a system of symbols within the cultural system. Meaning can only be ascribed to linguistic behaviour, i.e. linguistic behaviour can only be understood if one knows the symbols of the cultural system and their meaning, since language is embedded in them. Geertz's cultural analysis also includes a historical dimension. History is unique to each individual culture; it shapes its development and becomes relevant for the present as the members of the cultural system derive patterns of meaning from it (cf. Einhoff 1994: 247). The system of reference shared by the members of a culture is natural and self-evident to them, it creates a feeling of unity. Thus, it plays a role in forming identity, or helps to stabilise identity by means of the conventional nature of human behaviour (cf. Kalverkämper 1995: 139).

### 1.2 Culture and language

Culture in its relationship to language is a matter of special relevance. It is part of a rather long philosophical tradition, much older than the field of intercultural communication. The idea of cultural differences in language originates in the 19th century with Humboldt stating that knowing a language and using it is the same as knowing a culture and acting within it. The works of Sapir and Whorf continue this line of thought in the field of linguistics. Whorf introduces the principle of linguistic relativity. His hypothesis is that languages have fundamentally different structures and that people are influenced, maybe even determined, by language in the way they perceive, experience and categorise their environment. To put it simply, different languages are associated with the different views their speakers take on the world. Both Sapir and Whorf reject the view that thinking is a universal process which is the same for all human beings. They suggest that there is no objective perception of the world and that differing linguistically determined perceptions of reality are relative to each other.

However strong or weak the mutual influence may be estimated, today the interconnection of language and culture is undisputed. Nutz (cf. 1994: 10), for example, speaks of a "relation of inclusion". Yet, even if we take it for granted that perception is linguistically influenced, a rigorous linguistic determinism does not seem tenable on the grounds that it is possible to widen one's own patterns of categorisation and perception to include elements of a 'foreign world view'.

### 1.3 The concept of 'communication'

As in the case of 'culture', there is a wide range of descriptions and definitions pertaining to 'communication'. First, there is the well-known traditional model of communication as the conveying of information. It involves a sender, who encodes a message and conveys it via a channel, and a receiver, who decodes the message. Here, communication is seen as a linear process determined by the sender, with only noise or a similar source of interference possibly affecting the transmission of the message. The actual meaning of the symbols and their effect on the communication partner, as well as the semantic and pragmatic content of the information, is not taken into account. The shortcomings of this description of human communication processes allow us to make several assumptions which are significant for the notion of communication in our context: communication is socially bound, i.e. the participants of communication are individuals acting in group processes. In communicative situations they are exposed to cultural,

socio-cultural and situational factors. Communication problems are therefore not only due to external sources of interference, but also to the participating individuals. The transmission of a message may be impaired, for example, by the quality of the sender's encoding or by the perceptional ability of the recipient, or by lack of harmony between the two.

This restricted interpretation of communication as a mere instrument for conveying speakers' aims has been superseded by a symbolic-interpretative concept in which communication is seen as having a constitutive character (cf. Warthun 1997: 13). This perspective emphasises that a "symbolic construction of reality" (Theis 1994: 40) takes place in communication. Communication is not merely a transmission of messages, but rather a reciprocal conveyance of symbols and signs. This symbolic character is not so much determined by the fact that verbal as well as non-verbal signs carry meaning *per se*, but by the fact that the signs evoke certain associations and ideas in the recipient. With his or her message the communicator expects to evoke assignments of meaning in the recipient similar to his or her own. This may or may not be the case, since the assignment carried out by the other participant depends on his or her experiences, personality, on cultural factors and other contextual aspects. It is indeed rather unlikely for the speakers' and listeners' assignments of meaning to coincide. They are usually said to converge to a certain degree (cf. Theis 1994: 48) if many of the factors influencing the assignment of meaning correspond, such as common experiences or similar socialisation.

## 2 Intercultural Communication: communication under difficult circumstances

Intercultural communication is communication under difficult circumstances (cf. Apeltauer 1995: 100). The difficulty can be accounted for by the fact that the communicators rely on different symbolic systems, contexts of experience and stores of knowledge. We tend to take our habits of perception and communication for granted as long as we are acting within our own group or culture. We are not actually aware of these habits; for the most part they are habitualised and so natural to us that it is often only through contrast that we become aware of them. Various levels of habits and knowledge can be differentiated: the formal linguistic level very much in the conscious sphere of communication is the one most likely to be recognized as being different in another culture. Things become more opaque and less explicit in the sphere of norms, values and attitudes, which play a part in shaping our actions and behaviour. Moreover, in intercultural communication, communication partners display and command different make-ups of socio-pragmatic competence. Problems arise as soon as the participants apply their respective knowledge about the conventions of communicating without further reflection, tacitly assuming that the other person is acting on similar knowledge.

## 3 The mental framework of interaction: perception and categorisation

Along with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis came the idea that there is no objective perception of reality. Perception and subsequent processes of cognition and categorisation are essential to communication and to human behaviour in general. These mechanisms act on three levels, i.e. on a cognitive, affective and social level (cf. Apeltauer 1995: 108ff.).

### 3.1 The cognitive function of categorisation in perception

It is a widely held belief that we constantly adapt our beliefs and attitudes if we are confronted with previously unknown facts and new information. Findings from cognitive psychology have shown, however, that this – somewhat simplistic – assumption is incorrect, and suggest in its place the constructive character of perception and cognition: we do not perceive every single detail of our environment and add it to our existing store of knowledge, but we form a general impression of everything on the basis of our previous knowledge and experience. This is the framework within which we perceive details and ascribe meaning to them. The underlying knowledge we fall back on is represented in what is called 'categories' or 'schemata'. Wildner-Bassett describes schemata as "archetypical structures of knowledge" (1991: 280), which every culture has developed on the basis of experiences within its respective environment. Nobody disputes that we cannot completely perceive reality in all its complexity (cf. Keller 1996: 229).

Functionally speaking, the constructive character of our perception helps us to enhance our receptive and mnemonic capacities: typical elements which are part of schemata can be reconstructed leaving more time and space for processing information in order to cope with atypical chunks of information which are inconsistent with what we knew or believed until then (cf. Huber 1989: 31f.). Categorisations fulfil the important function of reducing complexity and providing orientation by simplifying and selecting things. There is a tendency to cut out elements of perception which are incongruent with our prior knowledge and to 'hone' them to our expectations. While these processes are indispensable for the perception and orientation of the human brain, they may bring disadvantages for interactional situations. Activating a certain category might stop us from grasping details which would be necessary to evaluate a situation, object or person adequately. The internalisation of systems of categories forms a part of the acculturation process in socialisation. Perception and categorisation using schemata are therefore culturally bound. This implies that a substantial part of perception is shaped in this way and that part of the behaviour resulting from it is habitualised without us being aware of it. We are, as Gudykunst puts it, "on automatic pilot" (1991: 26).

It is this cultural 'coinage' that speakers take with them into intercultural situations. The interpretation and assigning of meaning to elements of the foreign culture are linked to the prestructured images formed by one's own culture. Misunderstandings then arise because of the assumption that the interlocutor is carrying out the same categorisations, together with the subsequent interpretations shaped by one's own culture.

Yet, taking into account the cultural peculiarities which the others' behaviour is based on and seeing things through their eyes requires a much greater effort. It also requires a certain amount of background knowledge to deal with unfamiliar phenomena in this way.

### 3.2 The affective function of categorisation in perception

As we said, categorisations are culturally bound and play an important part in the socialisation of human beings. In fact, cultural customs and norms form part of a person's identity. As described above, categorisations help to give orientation to the extent that unfamiliar details are cut out of perception, thus giving it a more familiar impression. In this context, the function of categorisations may also be seen as strengthening the self-image (cf. Güttler 1996: 74). When coming into contact with a foreign culture – be it in a foreign country in a very direct way or in the EFL classroom in a more distant way – we are confronted with unknown phenomena clashing with concepts we are used to. If these incongruities cannot be ignored any more and cannot be

integrated into our own system of categories either, this often triggers off a feeling of insecurity, anxiety or irritation.

This can be dealt with in different ways. If we understand that each culture with its own way and system is a creative answer to the question of orientation and way of life in a certain environment, it is possible to bring unfamiliar peculiarities more in tune with our own categories: we may categorise them as just "another kind of X" (cf. Apeltauer 1995: 112). One way to accept the equal relativity of cultures is to expand our own categories to include these novel elements.

### 3.3 The social function of categorisation in perception

Processes of categorisation can be understood as being socially bound in two different ways: first, they are socially conditioned, as mentioned before, and second, they have an influence on social situations and activities including communication and co-operation with other people or groups of people. Categorisations referring to a group of people or individual members of it are referred to as 'stereotypes'.

'Prejudice' denotes a similar concept, yet it is a more comprehensive term. In order to differentiate between the two, definitions in the social sciences make use of the concept of 'attitude' as generic term for both – with its three dimensions: the cognitive, the affective and the conative component. Any attitude can be analysed and described along these dimensions.

When using the term stereotype we refer particularly to the cognitive dimension of prejudices: different nationalities are associated with different schemata on which certain expectations are formed. These are automatically transferred to people of the respective nationality, e.g. "Americans have no culture", "the British are polite" or "Germans are impolite", to name just a few. If schemata are characterised by mostly negative, affective attitudes concerning another group, we speak of prejudice. Prejudices are extremely resistant to change due to the above reasons of social mediation, the delimitation from others and a function of orientation inherent in categorisations.

## 4 Aspects of successful intercultural communication

### 4.1 Change of attitude through a widening of categories

To overcome the difficulties in intercultural communication caused by categorisation processes, a change of attitude must take place. Yet, such a change – especially concerning prejudice – is a very hard thing to achieve. Changing attitudes usually goes together with a change or a modification of personality and is the result of a long process, if at all attainable.

It has already been mentioned that someone who is confronted with a foreign culture should preferably be aware of cultural relativity and capable of widening one's cognitive categories. The "dimensionality and differentiation" (Schäfer & Six 1978: 35) of cognitive categories is used to describe to what extent discrepancies between one's own perceptional categories and unfamiliar phenomena can be tolerated. People who display rather broad categories do not rely as much on their own cultural viewpoints. Their assumptions of the foreign persons or situations are more insecure, since they do not know enough for an assessment. This does not mean that they

automatically make adequate attributions, but is rather a sign that they are prepared to look for them.

In dealing with stereotypes it is crucial to consider that, for the most part, categorisation and attribution takes place while we are 'on automatic pilot'. They are not the result of inflexible thinking, but are rather a human feature. Therefore, our aim cannot be to discard or ignore stereotypes, but to reflect on them and make ourselves aware of the strong influence of one's own cultural habits whenever difficult intercultural situations arise. As Baumgratz-Gangl (1990: 115) puts it, it would be useful if we just could turn off the automatism of ignoring or even rejecting 'the unfamiliar'. Yet, on a conscious level at least we can try and look on our interpretations as being provisional or preliminary.

## 4.2 Comparing cultures

Students bring their "cultural baggage" (Byram 1989: 111) with them into the classroom. Intercultural learning must include an understanding of the conceptual knowledge and the respective categorisation processes that speakers use as a cognitive system of reference: we cannot understand others without understanding ourselves (cf. Raddatz 1996: 247).

Intercultural communication makes it necessary to see things from two perspectives: examining phenomena in our own culture can help us to become aware of culturally shaped habits and patterns. And by reflecting on the impression we have on others, we are forced to see familiar things from another perspective. The process of contrasting cultures is an essential element of intercultural communication. Naturally, it is vital to develop schemata which are shaped by our own culture, yet we must try to understand the target culture within its own framework.

By adopting the foreign perspective and by trying to understand its cultural basis, we question the norms of our own culture, which enables us to become aware of the relativity of cultures and to see them as being equal. This, however, should not be misconstrued as giving up one's own norms, values and cultural background. It merely entails forming adequate hypotheses and expectations about the meaning of unfamiliar phenomena, or if that cannot be achieved, at least in an awareness of the fact that we have no basis for any sort of attributions of meaning.

## 4.3 Empathy

Another key element of intercultural understanding is the notion of empathy. This refers to the ability to put oneself in someone else's position and see things through their eyes. Empathy is the social psychological correlate of the process of comparing cultures as described above. Putting oneself in someone else's position also means trying to understand how other people perceive and construct reality, and that by taking our perceptional and cognitive processes for granted we arrive at 'wrong' assumptions.

Empathetic behaviour is closely connected with other characteristics and attitudes which are of great benefit to communication, especially to intercultural communication, such as patience, amiability, common sense and calmness. It is obvious that this kind of competence is not something which is taught in the foreign language classroom only and indeed it is highly questionable whether it can validly be taught at all. It consists of personal features of a more general – and even moral – level. Once more it becomes obvious that teaching intercultural

communication is not simply the teaching of specific bits of knowledge, but involving the whole personality in a learning process.

## 5 Aspects of intercultural communication in EFL teaching

The preceding paragraphs contain a number of ideas that might be usefully integrated into EFL lessons concerned with intercultural communication. Yet, many of the following methodical suggestions are not new: the teaching of intercultural communication includes a number of principles and exercises which have proven their value in the past.

### 5.1 Learner activation and holistic learning

The principle of orientation towards the learner includes taking into account his or her perceptional abilities. In the context of intercultural communication, these are most profitably applied to holistic learning. This refers to a learning process in which we use all our senses, learning, as it were, 'with your head, heart and hand'. Generally speaking, teaching is characterised by an unfortunate cognitive predominance. In dealing with language, analytical and descriptive targets and procedures are by far the most prevalent.

It is an explicit aim of intercultural communication to create tolerance for cultural variety and other lifestyles. On the cognitive level alone such abilities can hardly be acquired and taught. It is more likely for a change of attitudes to be triggered by personally touching encounters and emotionally important experiences. Intercultural teaching of EFL should therefore aim at more affective modes of learning. Since intercultural communication requires us to become active, discuss and think about the reality of our own culture and the target culture in detail, this active involvement should be reflected in teaching methods and must be taught and practised.

### 5.2 Process orientation

Within the concept of intercultural communication the process of learning a foreign language is defined as basically 'unfinished', similar to the development of our mother tongue and the development of personality in general. It is the process and not the product of learning which is considered to be central. This implies a continuing 'openness' and the willingness and ability to learn not only in school but also afterwards and 'under one's own steam'. Teaching can support this by aiming for learner autonomy, providing students with the logistic, methodological and psychological prerequisites for sustaining a continual profitable learning process.

### 5.3 Awareness teaching

As was mentioned above, the aim of intercultural communicative ability implies a culture-contrastive approach: the learner should become more aware of his or her own culture. Learners should be enabled to anticipate problems inherent in intercultural contact and to understand elements of the unfamiliar cultural system. This requires the sensitisation for different cultures

and different outlooks on life. It is important for students to see that the foreign language is more than a differently coded version of the mother tongue.

This sensitisation is mainly subsumed under the headword 'cultural awareness'. Since perception is normally a kind of subconscious routine behaviour, teaching must practise conscious perception. One way of realising this is to find tasks which require the students to make precise observations about cultural elements of the target country, which include external aspects such as sounds of daily life, as well as patterns of cultural behaviour or even values and beliefs.

### 5.4 Change of attitudes

It has been mentioned that due to the brain's physiology, the complexity of perception is reduced in order to structure and organise incoming information. It would be inadequate to regard simplifications of reality, including stereotypes, as phenomena which can be overcome sooner or later. They are, actually, characteristic of the human species.

Dealing with prejudices is of special interest in EFL teaching. It has been posited that good results in learning a foreign language are less dependent on intelligence and talent, but on the learner's willingness and attitudes (cf. Hermann-Brennecke 1991: 74). Lack of prejudice and a sense of integration have a positive effect. One way to counteract failure or difficulties in learning a foreign language may consist in talking explicitly about narrow-mindedness and ethnocentric attitudes. The influence on learners can be maximised if cognitive, affective as well as conative factors are activated: cognition can be reached through presenting sufficient information; secondly, there should be an opportunity to form positive affects towards the target culture, and the conative component should be stimulated by providing opportunities for acting out language and simulate real-life behaviour.

Despite such perspectives, there is no reason to be overly optimistic. As Güttler puts it (cf. 1996:169), it is easier to split the atom than to change prejudices. The probability of communication leading to a change of attitudes can be seen as being dependent on the reception and acceptance on the part of the learner. This brings us back to the important issue of stimulating motivation. Reception is substantial if the motivation to listen is strong, i.e. the teaching object must be perceived to be of direct use or interest to students. As far as acceptance is concerned, it is important to give learners the chance to form an opinion on something themselves, but also to show them how to get there.

## 6 Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to illustrate some fundamental aspects of intercultural communication and to make some general suggestions as to how they can be dealt with in teaching. Aside from the central aspect of communication difficulties, special emphasis has been laid on the fact that intercultural learning involves knowledge construction as well as certain aspects of personality development – a by no means mean, but hopefully attainable feat to achieve.

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# IMAGES AND STEREOTYPES OF IRELAND IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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*Ireland has played only a minor role in the minds of EFL pupils, students and teachers in Germany. If it was considered at all in the EFL classroom, the main focus was on the (now historic) conflict in Northern Ireland between Catholics and Protestants. These images, although relevant, prevail, while aspects of everyday life and of the modern Celtic Tiger are neglected – despite the fact that a comprehensive and well-balanced picture of Ireland is essential for intercultural communication and contacts between Germans and Irish.*
*This paper presents the results of a survey examining the images and stereotypes which students of the University of Augsburg hold of Ireland and its inhabitants, while exploring the role of stereotypes in language and culture teaching: even a coarse or imbalanced image can serve as a first step towards intercultural communication when learners are made aware of the functions as well as of the origins of their stereotypical reception of a foreign culture.*

## 1 Introduction

English, with its 415 million native speakers, is geographically the most widespread language in the world. As a second or a foreign language, English is taught more often than any other language: "there are 800 million whose English is [...] a *lingua franca*, an instrument of basic communication" (Schröder 1993: 18). English is without a doubt today's language of international communication, and the ability to communicate in English is the main objective in English language teaching.

However, reaching this goal is not easy. In teaching practice, communicating in English is narrowed down to communicating with native speakers of English, which is usually restricted even further to communicating with native speakers of English from Great Britain and the United States of America. There are, in reality, many more people who are able to communicate in English than just native speakers, and of course there are more than two countries whose people have English as a mother tongue. There is, for example, Ireland[1].

So far, English language education has paid little attention to this small country at the edge of Europe – but it still belongs to Europe. It does not belong to Great Britain, and it is not part of the Commonwealth, as it is often falsely assumed: the Republic of Ireland became a Free State in 1921 and gained its independence after World War II, whereas Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom. The Republic has been a member of the European Union since 1973.

With Ireland there is a second English-speaking country in Europe. It has its own culture and variety of English (Hiberno-English), and it is becoming – especially among Germans – increasingly popular as a holiday destination. Considering this together with the fact that Europe's nations are moving economically and politically closer together, Ireland's status in English language and culture teaching should be enhanced in order to contribute to intercultural communication.

[1] The term 'Ireland' refers to the whole island (the Republic of Ireland as well as Northern Ireland) unless it is explicitly stated otherwise.

The aim of this paper is, after a short outline of some theoretical aspects of cultural stereotypes, to report on a survey of what Bavarian students know about Ireland, how they evaluate the role of Irish culture in their education, and, above all, what stereotypes they hold of the Irish and their country, based on statements given in a questionnaire which is appended at the end of the paper. It should be mentioned that compared to the very detailed and comprehensive studies by Schröder & Macht (1983) and Kennedy & Schröder (1992), which both examined "foreign language learning experience, foreign language learning needs and the respondents' attitudes toward European multilingualism" (Kennedy & Schröder 1992: 434f.), this survey with its focus on stereotypes of Ireland is more limited regarding scope and number of respondents.

## 2 Stereotypes and intercultural communication

Stereotypes are everywhere. We use them in all types of situations, but mainly in connection with different cultural or ethnic groups. One typical and widespread stereotype of Ireland is, for example, that the people of this country have red hair. This may well be true for some of them, but it certainly does not apply to all Irish people. Why, then, do we still retain these stereotypical images and continue to use them – even though we should know that it is highly unlikely that all members of a group or country share one single characteristic?

### 2.1 Towards a definition of stereotypes

The expression 'stereotype' was first used in a sociological context by Walter Lippmann in his *Public Opinion* (1922)[2] for "the stored up images, the preconceptions, and prejudices which interpret [...] and [...] direct the play of our attention, and our vision itself". A characteristic of a stereotype is that it precedes the use of reason; is a form of perception, imposes a certain character on the data of our senses before the data reach the intelligence:

> For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see. In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture. (Lippmann 1949: 81)

As Bausinger puts it, 'stereotype' is the scientific term for an unscientific attitude (1988: 160). Roughly, stereotypes are generalisations, a result "of categorizing the social environment into groups" (Husemann 1991: 18). This is a consequence of ethnocentrism and necessary for individuals to identify with their own group in contrast to a different one ('us' vs. 'them'). Stereotyping is commonly tainted with negative connotations. Scollon & Scollon criticise the fact that "characteristics of the group are not only overgeneralized to apply to each member of the group, but they are also taken to have some exaggerated negative or positive value" (1995: 155).

Stereotyping, however, is unavoidable. Nobody is free of stereotypes, they are "part of man's natural limitations" (Husemann 1991: 32). Therefore, stereotypes are also present in foreign language and culture teaching and have to be dealt with when striving for intercultural communication as the aim of language teaching.

[2] Lippmann's *Public Opinion* was first published in 1922; here, quotations are taken from an edition of 1949.

Lippmann's statement comprehensively encompasses the functions of stereotyping when he says:

> A pattern of stereotypes [...] is not merely a way of substituting order for the great blooming, buzzing confusion of reality. It is not merely a short cut. It is all these things and something more. It is the guarantee of our self-respect; it is the projection upon the world of our own sense of our own value, our own position and our own rights. The stereotypes are, therefore, highly charged with the feelings that are attached to them. They are the fortress of our tradition, and behind its defenses we can continue to feel ourselves safe in the position we occupy. (1949: 96)

Stereotypes provide social and cultural identity, offering at the same time "justification for actions planned or committed against other groups" (Husemann 1991: 21), and they simplify, reduce and help us to understand the complexity of our environment. They connect this complex reality "with our prior knowledge and experience" (Bredella 1988: 8).

Successful intercultural communication presupposes, *inter alia*, knowledge about cultures other than one's own, and a less ethnocentric way of thinking (cf. Nutz 1994: 12). To a certain extent, both aspects – one cognitive and one emotional – involve stereotyping. To hold a stereotype of a different group or culture shows that at least some thought and attention is given to it; Scollon & Scollon note that "there is usually a good bit of accurate cultural observation [i.e. knowledge] which underlies stereotypes" (1995: 156). People who think that red hair is (stereo-) typically Irish, therefore have more than likely noticed at least one red-haired Irish person. As for ethnocentrism, we identify ourselves with our own group, contrasting it with others: Irish people have red hair, we do not. This is, according to Bredella, a "necessary consequence of socialization" in the way that "it is our culture that orders the world for us and gives us security. It tells us what to do and what to expect in certain situations" (1988: 2f.) – corresponding with Lippmann's above-quoted description of stereotypes.

## 2.2 Dealing with stereotypes in language and *Landeskunde* teaching

The problems of stereotyping are obvious: as a consequence of ethnocentrism, stereotypes can be rather persistent and immune to modification. Further, certain aspects of the character or behaviour of another group or culture are isolated from their social context and are overgeneralised. This leads to the "homogenization and depersonalization of out-group members" (Husemann 1991: 21), and, as we are blinded to other characteristics, stereotypes limit our understanding and our view of human activity "to just one or two salient dimensions" (Scollon & Scollon 1995: 156).

However, if stereotypes are taken as rough schemes, as "pre-existing stock of ideas and information (however limited or distorted)" (Husemann 1991: 25) about the foreign country of the target language, which are based on at least some actual knowledge, they can be more of an aid than an obstacle to language and culture teaching. So, instead of unsuccessfully trying to combat and condemn stereotypes[3], the learners' stereotypical knowledge should be dealt with in *Landeskunde* as a first step in the right direction (cf. Nutz 1994: 30): towards intercultural communication via an increased awareness of existing stereotypes.

[3] According to Lippmann, this is useless in any event because "the need of economizing attention is so inevitable that the abandonment of all stereotypes for a wholly innocent approach to experience would impoverish human life" (1949: 90).

Schröder (1987: 6), for example, encourages teachers to present cultural aspects at first in a rather simplified and stereotyped manner, emphasising that the picture presented must be refined and modified later in order to gain a realistic complexity. Gudykunst continues that "the cautious accumulation of stereotyped images can help a person to understand another culture in general and the differences between that culture and his or her own" (1991: 76).

> We are told about the world before we see it. We imagine most things before we experience them. And those preconceptions, unless education has made us acutely aware, govern deeply the whole process of perception. (Lippmann 1949: 90; my emphasis)

What has to be achieved in *Landeskunde* teaching is awareness: learners have to understand that all human behaviour is culturally conditioned. Thus, "the specific task as a teacher of language and culture is to help pupils realise that the world is not monolingual and monocultural" (Byram 1991: 29f.) as well as to detect and make them aware of existing stereotypes.

## 3 Bavarian students' stereotypes of Ireland

What, then, are the existing stereotypes? This paper's empirical contribution tries to answer this question and focuses on the stereotypes of Ireland that exist among students who acquired *Hochschulreife* at Bavarian *Gymnasien*.[4] The emerging stereotypes and additional data gained from the survey, carried out at the University of Augsburg in 1999, should help to identify learners' deficiencies in their knowledge about Ireland, refine the existing schemes and, above all, encourage an increase of the importance of Ireland in English *Landeskunde* teaching.

### 3.1 The students' personal background

In the present total of 107 informants (all university students)[5], female respondents (64) outnumbered male respondents (43). Concerning the subjects studied at university, the results covered various disciplines: 29 respondents studied English, 3 respondents studied a foreign language other than English, and 75 respondents studied subjects other than foreign languages, which are not listed here. Thus, there were a total of 32 respondents studying foreign languages. A majority of 41 people had studied English for nine years at school, 29 had studied it for seven, 13 for eight, 10 for five, 9 for ten and 3 for six years. 2 respondents claimed to have studied English for eleven and for thirteen years. The course book used most at school was Klett's *Learning English: Modern Course* (33 students), while Cornelsen's *English G* was used by 15. However, almost half the respondents could not recall the name of their English course books at school.

QUESTION I:

Students were asked in what areas of life they had contact with or learned something about Irish culture; they could tick more than one answer. In comparison to *film and television* (90 ticks) and *music* (67 ticks), the results for *school* (35 ticks) and *university* (18 ticks) were, as

[4] The survey was restricted to Bavarian schools in order to simplify a correlation with teaching material and its presentation of Ireland.

[5] The numbers of students or answers are always given in figures and not in words. Tables and lists display all the information gathered from the questionnaires; the preceding paragraphs comment only on certain aspects.

expected, rather poor. To the number of 45 ticks for *private contacts*, the areas "Irish pubs" (13 ticks), "holidays" (7 ticks) and "sports/leisure" (2 ticks) – named in the category *others* – could be added, which would then make a total of 67 ticks for personal, unmediated activities.

| AREAS OF CONTACT | NUMBER OF TICKS |
|---|---|
| *film and television* | 90 |
| *music* | 67 |
| *books* | 51 |
| *print media* | 47 |
| *private contacts* | 45 |
| *school* | 35 |
| *university* | 18 |
| *others*: "Irish pubs" (in Germany) | 13 |
| *others*: "holidays" | 4 |
| *others*: "sports and leisure" | 2 |

TABLE 1:
*In what areas of life do you have contact with Irish culture and/or learn something about the country and its people?*

QUESTION II:

When asked where they got information about Ireland from, only 2 students named "university" as a source for information, whereas "friends" was mentioned 30 times – in correspondence with the figures from question I (45 ticks for the area *private contacts*).

| SOURCE OF INFORMATION | NUMBER OF ANSWERS |
|---|---|
| "print media" | 76 |
| "personal contacts" | 41 |
| "film and television" | 19 |
| "internet" | 6 |
| Other | 4 |
| "university" | 2 |
| "no interest" | 1 |
| no answer | 1 |

TABLE 2:
*If you want to learn about Ireland, where do you get information from?*

QUESTION III:

A majority of 72 students (67%) have not yet been to Ireland, but most of them (67 respondents) wished to go in future; 35 students (33%) – 16 of them students of English – have been to the country before and also would like to go there again. The respondents gave various reasons for a/another visit to Ireland, as shown in the table below. 1 student did not state whether he wanted to visit Ireland or not – he has had "bad experiences with Irish people". For 2 people "bad weather" was a reason not to go to Ireland.

| REASONS FOR A VISIT IN IRELAND | NUMBER OF STUDENTS |
|---|---|
| "beautiful landscape" | 46 |
| "interest in the country and its people" | 16 |
| "friendly people" | 15 |
| "general interest in Ireland as a holiday destination" | 5 |
| "famous pubs and beer" | 2 |
| "interest in the (English) language" | 1 |
| "wish to visit every European country" | 1 |
| no answer | 30 |

TABLE 3:
*Why would you like to visit Ireland (again)?*

QUESTION IV:

There was almost an even distribution of respondents who personally know Irish people (48 students) (45%) and those who did not (59 students) (55%).[6] 36 out of the 48 respondents who know an Irish person wished to meet other Irish people – amongst them 22 students of English. 3 did not respond, 1 of these being the same who did not answer question III because he has had "bad experiences with Irish people". 1 out of 24 considered his command of English, after ten years of studying English at school (!), insufficient to make contact with Irish people. 7 students (out of 59 students who had never met an Irish person before) not wishing to make contact gave no reasons for their answer. The reasons for respondents who would like to meet Irish people are summarised in the following table:

| REASONS FOR MEETING IRISH PEOPLE | NUMBER OF STUDENTS |
|---|---|
| "interest in meeting people from other countries" | 16 |
| "interest in the country and its culture" | 9 |
| "good experiences with Irish people" | 8 |
| "interest in meeting new people" | 7 |
| "love for the language" | 3 |
| "interest in political situation" | 1 |
| no answer | 52 |

TABLE 4:
*Why would you like to meet an Irish person?*

### 3.2 The students' stereotypes of the Irish people and their country

QUESTION 1:

When the students were asked what they associated with the word 'Ireland', the responses were quite diverse – which is only natural as associations are, of course, very subjective. Some respondents thought, for example, of Ireland's geography (e.g. "cliffs"), others named historical aspects (e.g. "Bloody Sunday"). Nevertheless, a vast majority of 75 respondents related Ireland to the colour "green"; and 56 referred to Irish pub culture, i.e. "whiskey" (6), "beer" (3), or more specifically "*Guinness*" (32) – with rather interesting spelling variations[7]. There were 38 associations concerning the political problem of Northern Ireland, with a wide range of terms: "terror", "religious conflict", "north-south-conflict", "war", "IRA", "Sinn Féin", "bombings", "fight for liberty", "peace talks" and many more.

[6] NB: Not all the people who had been to Ireland stated that they knew an Irish citizen personally.
[7] NB: Many respondents (e.g. in this question: 12 out of 32) were unable to spell *Guinness* correctly; the spelling varied from "Guiness", "Guinnes" to "Guinnesse".

| ASSOCIATIONS WITH IRELAND | NUMBER OF ANSWERS |
|---|---|
| "green" | 75 |
| "Northern Ireland conflict" | 38 |
| "*Guinness*" | 32 |
| "rain" | 29 |
| "beautiful landscape" | 28 |
| "music" | 24 |
| "pub culture" | 24 |
| "sheep" | 23 |
| "sea/cliffs" | 15 |
| "red hair" | 12 |
| "castles/ruins" | 8 |
| "butter"; "St Patrick" | 6 each |
| "Dublin"; "friendly people" | 5 each |
| "druids" | 4 |
| "literature"; "shamrock" | 3 each |
| "America"; "Celts"; "famine"; "freckles"; "religion"; "woollen sweaters" | 2 each |
| "Leprechaun"; "poverty" | 1 each |
| no answer | - |

TABLE 5.A:
*What do you associate with the word "Ireland"?*

Most of the students who have been to Ireland (23 out of 35 respondents) explained their associations from "personal experiences". However, it was the media that had the greatest influence on the informants' image of Ireland – as expected: the "media in general" (22), "film and television" (19), "news and documentaries" (14), "newspapers" (10). Only 4 students named "school/EFL classes" as their source. 9 respondents explicitly stated that they were affected by the "usual stereotypes" shown in holiday brochures (5) and advertisements[8] (9); unfortunately, these statements were without further explanation.

| EXPLANATIONS FOR ASSOCIATIONS | NUMBER OF ANSWERS |
|---|---|
| "media" | 65 |
| "personal experiences" | 23 |
| "conversations with friends" | 11 |
| "usual stereotypes" | 9 |
| "music" | 5 |
| "school/EFL classes" | 4 |
| no answer | 7 |

TABLE 5.B:
*How can you explain those associations?*

QUESTION 2:

Here, the students were asked to describe what a typical Irish person might look like. The results showed that the common stereotype of a red-haired Irishman with pale, freckled skin (172 references altogether) actually exists – equally among respondents who have been to Ireland and those who have not. There are also no considerable differences between language students and non-language students. 21 respondents agreed on this combination of features ("red hair + pale skin + freckles"); the chart shows the total count of each characteristic. As for the physique, the

[8] This explains the relatively frequent association of "butter" in Table 5a, since the *Kerrygold* advertisements are quite frequent on German television.

answers were not as unambiguous: 26 students stated that the Irish were "small", while 8 believed them to be "tall", 19 respondents said they were "stout", 10 thought they were "strong", and 10 said that Irish people were "thin".

| (STEREO-)TYPICAL IRISH FEATURES | NUMBER OF ANSWERS |
|---|---|
| "red-haired" | 89 |
| "freckled" | 53 |
| "pale" | 30 |
| "small" | 26 |
| "dark-haired" | 18 |
| "blue-eyed" | 14 |
| "stout" | 19 |
| "strong", "thin" | 10 each |
| "green-eyed" | 9 |
| "tall" | 8 |
| "friendly expression" | 7 |
| "curly-haired" | 5 |
| "blond"; "dark-eyed"; "wearing a woollen sweater" | 3 each |
| "drunk/drunk-looking" | 2 |
| "wearing a cap" | 1 |
| no answer | 2 |

TABLE 6:
*In your opinion, what does a typical Irish person look like?*

QUESTION 3:

Here, the focus was shifted from outer appearance to the character of Irish people. In comparison to the previous question, the answers were widely varied, nevertheless presenting a generally positive picture, especially amongst the 48 students who personally knew an Irish person (68 references to positive traits). What was striking, however, was the frequent reference of all respondents to Irish drinking habits – with positive ("sociable drinkers": 5) as well as negative connotations ("drunk": 2): "fond of drinking", which was classed as a neutral attribute in the overall picture, was mentioned 45 times and is thus the prominent feature of the Irish character amongst the informants.

When summarizing the various answers and classing them in three different categories – according to their positive (+), neutral (0) and negative (-) consequences for successful intercultural communication – an altogether favourable description of the Irish character emerges: 102 positive traits, 68 neutral traits and 16 negative traits were mentioned.

| (STEREO-)TYPICAL IRISH ATTRIBUTES | NUMBER OF ANSWERS |
|---|---|
| "fond of drinking" (0) | 45 |
| "sociable/easy-going" (+) | 24 |
| "friendly/nice/likeable" (+) | 23 |
| "humorous" (+) | 20 |
| "open" (+) | 14 |
| "religious/catholic" (0) | 7 |
| "proud of their nationality" (0) | 6 |
| "hospitable" (+); "sociable drinkers" (+) | 5 each |
| "musical" (0); "relaxed" (+) | 4 each |
| "helpful" (+); "melancholy" (-); "pessimistic" (-); "unpunctual" (-) | 3 each |
| "drunk/heavy-drinking" (-); "narrow-minded" (-) | 2 each |

| | |
|---|---|
| "Anglophobic" (0); "conservative" (0); "emotional" (0); "fanatic" (-); "funny" (+); "happy" (+); "honest" (+); "lively" (0); "poor" (0); "quiet" (-); "reserved" (-); "spontaneous" (0); "talkative" (+) | 1 each |
| no answer | 11 |

TABLE 7:
*How would you describe the Irish character?*

QUESTION 4:

The results gained from this question (*What pictures do you have in mind when you think of Ireland?*) resembled in the main the students' associations from question 1.a, but the answers referred more to the country itself (e.g. "green fields", "rough coastline" or "ruins of castles"). The image of the Emerald Isle, which is promoted by Irish and German tourist boards, is predominated – once again – by the country's pub culture and drinking behaviour[9] ("pubs": 25) and typical Irish drinks such as "*Guinness*" (37) and "whiskey" (10); a total of 26 students agreed on "a pint of *Guinness*" as the most suitable symbol for Ireland. Some students also mentioned – together with the beer – typical Irish food: "salmon" (2) and "potatoes" (3); "butter" was mentioned 6 times, but only by students who had not been to the country. Some answers displayed a certain confusion concerning cultural heritage: "Stonehenge" (2), "tossing the caber" (1), "Loch Ness" (1) and "kilts" (2), which is *Schottenrock* (!) in German.

The relatively large number of 35 students not answering the second part of the question might be due to the similarity to questions 1 and 4.a.

| PICTURES OF IRELAND | NUMBER OF ANSWERS |
|---|---|
| "pubs/drinks" | 73 |
| "green/green fields/unspoilt landscape" | 48 |
| "sheep" | 18 |
| "ruins/castles" | 15 |
| "folk music" | 14 |
| "rain" | 12 |
| "IRA/bombings" | 9 |
| "butter" | 6 |
| "Dublin" | 5 |
| "potatoes"; "St Patrick's Day" | 3 each |
| "cliffs"; "cottages"; "high cross"; "myths"; "salmon"; "sea"; "tap dance" | 2 each |
| "Belfast"; "fishermen"; "fish 'n' chips"; "Irish Stew"; "shamrock"; "woollen sweaters"; "tea" | 1 each |
| no answer | 5 |

TABLE 8.A:
*What pictures do you have in mind when you think of Ireland?*

| SUITABLE NATIONAL SYMBOL | NUMBER OF ANSWERS |
|---|---|
| "pint of Guinness" | 26 |
| "sheep" | 18 |
| "Celtic cross" | 8 |
| "St Patrick" | 5 |
| "glass of whiskey" | 4 |
| "bloody cross"; "bombs"; "castle"; "cliffs"; "green"; "James Joyce"; "pub"; "rain cloud"; "U2" | 2 each |

[9] One respondent studying a subject other than foreign languages explicitly referred to a "high consumption of alcohol".

| | |
|---|---|
| "Book of Kells"; "butter"; "cap"; "leprechaun"; "many children"; "potatoes"; "sea"; "tin whistle"; "tweed"; | 1 each |
| no answer | 35 |

TABLE 8.B:
*What would be suitable as a national symbol?*

### 3.3 The students' opinion of their Irish culture education at school

Almost half the respondents (50 students) said that they had not explicitly talked about Ireland in school, 57 students said they had. The following list gives the different materials the respondents used in addition to their English course books; 9 students did not use any additional material, 13 students gave no answer:

> "newspaper articles" (18), "slides/photos" (7), "news magazine (such as *Newsweek*, *Time*, *World & Press*) articles" (6), "films" (5), "novels" (4), "maps" (3), "TV reports" (3), "songs" (2), "radio programmes" (1).

In question 6, the number of students who had dealt with Ireland in their English classes were asked to assess their experiences with the presentation of the country and its culture by ticking one suitable answer on a five-point scale. The results would be ideal if every respondent ticked the most positive answer: the highest score would then be 5 credits per student per question[10]. An average figure of 3.4 per student in question 6.a showed that the cultural education at school had been *helpful* – at least to a certain degree – for the students towards their understanding of Ireland; the credits ranged from 1 to 5. The result for question 6.b was more negative: an average of 2.5 per student indicated that the preparation at school for a stay in Ireland must have been *rather bad*; no one gave full credits. Question 6.c was answered by only 22 students, as this was the amount of people who talked about Ireland in school and also had visited the country. Individual credits ranged from 2 to 5, adding up to an average figure of 2.6 per student, which means that their personal experiences corresponded only *to some degree* with the picture of Ireland presented at school.

The topics the students had discussed at school almost exclusively concerned the problem of Northern Ireland: 50 out of 57 respondents (2 did not answer to question 7.a) mentioned either the "Northern Ireland conflict" itself or the "IRA", which is practically the same topic. Other subjects with more than 1 answer were Ireland's "history" (8) and the "unemployment" problem (3). 19 students responded to question 7.b that they were actually interested in the "Northern Ireland conflict", but wrote in the following question 7.c that they had dealt with this topic either "too exclusively" (8), "too long" (6) or "too superficially" (5).

These statements were in accordance with the students' suggestions and criticism in question 9: 14 students repeated their answers from questions 7.b and 7.c and complained about the single focus on the Northern Ireland conflict, while a further 19 demanded a more detailed treatment of Ireland in class, taking aspects of everyday life into account. 17 students criticised that they had not dealt with Ireland at all in class, another 4 students wished that Ireland were treated separately, and not in connection with Britain.

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[10] In order to be able to present the results, each answer was graded with a different amount of credits:
Question 6.a (N = 57): *very helpful* = 5, *helpful* = 4, *less helpful* = 3, *of little use* = 2, *of no use* = 1
Question 6.b (N = 57): *very well* = 5, *well* = 4, *OK* = 3, *rather badly* = 2, *very badly* = 1
Question 6.c (N = 22): *absolutely* = 5, *in general* = 4, *to some degree* = 3, *hardly* = 2, *not at all* = 1

Question 10 was answered seriously by only 16 respondents: someone, for example, strongly recommended Ireland as a holiday destination, another student suggested to establish more exchange programmes and partnerships between German and Irish schools or universities.

A list of the students' interests named in question 8 (*In regard to Ireland, what aspects would interest you particularly?*) concludes this section:

> "culture" (27), "country itself and its people" (26), "history" (19), "geography" (12), "lifestyle" (12), "Irish English" (7), "Northern Ireland conflict" (11), "music" (6), "sights" (6), "traditions" (5), "literature" (3), "myths" (3), "sports" (3), "economy" (2), "everything" (2), "religion" (2), "anything but the IRA" (1), "educational system" (1), "Irish film and literature" (1).

### 3.4 The students' general knowledge of Ireland

In the last part of the questionnaire, the students were asked a few questions which would test their general knowledge of Ireland. Each correct answer for questions A to F and each name of an Irish personality in question G, up to a limit of ten, were worth 1 point, adding up to an ideal total of 16 credits. The average score of all respondents was a disappointing 5.6 points. It is interesting to see that the best group of students, with an average score of 7.7, were the ones who had been to Ireland before (35 students), while students of English without a stay in Ireland (14 people) scored only 5.3 points. The students of other subjects (68 people) formed the group with the lowest score of 4.1 points. Three people obtained full marks; they studied English and had visited the country.

12 students did not respond to question G; the rest wrote down 58 different names of famous Irish people from music, politics, sports etc. – 40 living, 18 dead:

| AREA OF PUBLIC LIFE | PERSONALITIES |
|---|---|
| *film* | Pierce Brosnan (6), †Dermot Morgan (2), Liam Neeson (2), Neil Jordan (1), Colm Meaney (1), Stephen Rea (1), Jim Sheridan (1) |
| *literature* | †James Joyce (27), †Oscar Wilde (9), †Samuel Beckett (6), †William Butler Yeats (5), Seamus Heaney (3), †George Bernard Shaw (3), †Jonathan Swift (3), †Brendan Behan (2), Frank McCourt (2), †Flann O'Brien (2), Maeve Binchy (1), Roddy Doyle (1), Bernard McLaverty (1), Sean O'Casey (1) |
| *music* | U2 (20), Sinéad O'Connor (17), Bono Vox (15), The Cranberries (11), Chris de Burgh (5), The Kelly Family (5), The Dubliners (3), Rory Gallagher (3), The Pogues (3), Boyzone (2), Bob Geldof (2), Van Morrison (2), Mary Black (1), Johnny Logan (1), †Phil Lynott (1), Christy Moore (1) |
| *politics* | Gerry Adams (15), †Michael Collins (6), †Éamon de Valera (4), Mary Robinson (4), Ian Paisley (3), Bertie Ahern (2), Mary McAleese (2), Albert Reynolds (2), David Trimble (2), †Sean MacBride (1), †Daniel O'Connell (1), †Charles Stuart Parnell (1), †Theobald Wolfe Tone (1) |
| *sports* | Eddie Irvine (4), Eddie Jordan (1), Roy Keane (1), Sean Kelly (1), Sonia O'Sullivan (1), Stephen Roche (1) |
| *other* | †St. Patrick (5), †Arthur Guinness (3) |

TABLE 9:
*Which Irish personalities do you know?*

## 4 Outlook

The survey showed that the respondents generally seemed to be very interested in Ireland and willing to make contact with Irish people and Irish culture. All in all, the results were quite positive, especially considering that more than half the respondents studied subjects other than English: 100 students wished to visit or return to the country, 86 students would like to meet Irish people, whose character was assessed very favourably.

What was quite astonishing was the fact that the country and its – supposedly mainly red-haired, pale and freckled – inhabitants were so frequently associated with drinking. The results from question 3 depicted the Irish mainly as heavy drinkers; in question 1 a number of 56 students connected Ireland with pubs and drinks, and in question 4 this number had even increased to 73 students. In the opinion of the greater amount of students, a pint of *Guinness* was the most suitable symbol for Ireland. The only question of the test at the end of the questionnaire that was consistently answered correctly was *What is "Guinness"?*.

Successful intercultural communication takes place when the speakers communicate and understand each other not only linguistically but also emotionally, i.e. when they have a common frame of reference, a basic agreement. When referring to topics as difficult to grasp as cultural phenomena, it is not predominantly a neutral and objective image that is needed for mutual understanding, but an image that can be related to and is considered appropriate by both speakers. What is appropriate, right, correct in our eyes is due to our upbringing and everyday experience; these conceptions and ideas are not necessarily true and objective, they are stereotypical. And this "self-image" (1968: 619) – a term coined by Keller in his *kulturkundliche Didaktik* (1968: 617ff.) – marks the starting-point for successful intercultural communication. For learners of a foreign language and culture it is therefore an essential prerequisite to become aware of the others' existing self-image (auto-stereotype) and compare it to their own image of the others' culture (hetero-stereotype).

A study carried out amongst BEd and BA students at Mary Immaculate College in Limerick in 1999 (Humpfer 2000: 68ff.) more or less confirmed the stereotypes that emerged from the survey at the University of Augsburg.[11] However, while the German bias towards Irish drinking habits and pub culture was reflected in the Irish self-image in numbers, its connotations were considerably more favourable: "pubs", "Guinness" and "whiskey" were considered a normal and significant part of Irish culture and a sign of Irish zest for life – corresponding to "laid-back" and "easy-going" people whose company is "good craic" (fun). This varying evaluation of a cultural phenomenon is another example of culturally conditioned behaviour and needs to be acknowledged as such. However, it is not the constant search for and display of similarities between two cultures that is needed in the EFL classroom; neither does this imply the importance of walking on common grounds in intercultural encounters. It is a contrastive approach that furthers a deeper understanding and encourages cultural reflections: "Both learners and teachers of a second language need to understand cultural differences, to recognize openly that everyone in the world is not 'just like me' (Brown 1996: 167).

In general, there is still a lot to be done to bring Ireland into the minds of pupils, students and teachers. Concerning the question of dealing with stereotypical images of Ireland and the presentation of the country and its culture in class, Ireland means more than the conflict between

[11] Since this particular survey lacks sufficient scope (46 students) in order to provide meaningful data towards the establishment of an Irish auto-stereotype, the results are merely summarized here.

Protestants and Catholics. Part three of the questionnaire has revealed that there is a wish to discuss other aspects of Ireland at school or university; the poor results obtained in part four have proved that there is also a need to do so. *Landeskunde* should not concentrate on only one single aspect of Ireland – however politically important and topical it may still be. Other areas regarding everyday life have to be considered as well when striving for a comprehensive picture of Ireland, as they seem to be more interesting and valuable for pupils in the case of intercultural contact. And as stereotypes are based on and refer to these aspects of everyday life, to the people of a country and their culture, they could serve as a starting point for a *rapprochement* between Germans and Irish: towards intercultural communication via an increased awareness and, if necessary, a modification of existing stereotypes in *Landeskunde*.

## 5 Appendix: Questionnaire (English Translation of the German Original)

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### Questionnaire on Ireland

- the term *Ireland* refers to *the whole island*, which is the Republic of Ireland as well as Northern Ireland -

**Questions on your personal background:**

( ) male ( ) female (please tick where appropriate)
What do you study? _____
How many years did you study English at school? _____
Which course books did you use at school? _____

I. In what areas of life do you have contact with Irish culture and/or learn anything about the country and its people?
(more than one answer possible)
( ) school ( ) university ( ) film and television ( ) print media ( ) books
( ) music ( ) personal contacts ( ) others: _____

II. If you want to learn about Ireland, where do you get information from?
_____

III. Have you ever been to Ireland? ( ) yes ( ) no
Would you like to visit Ireland (again)? ( ) yes ( ) no
Why (not)? _____

IV. Do you personally know an Irish person? ( ) yes ( ) no
Would you like to meet an Irish person? ( ) yes ( ) no
Why (not) ? _____

**Please answer the following questions sincerely:**

1.a. Without further premeditation, with what do you associate the word *Ireland*?
_____

1.b. How can you explain those associations?
_____

2. In Hollywood films, Germans are usually tall, blond and blue-eyed. In your opinion, what does a typical Irish person look like?
_____

3. Punctuality, lack of humour and self-discipline are considered to be typical German characteristics. How would you describe the Irish?

_____

4.a. Bavaria is frequently associated with the Munich beer festival, Neuschwanstein Castle or *Weißwurstfrühstück*. What pictures do you have in mind when you think of Ireland?

_____

4.b. The harp and the shamrock are Ireland's official symbols. What else would be suitable as a national symbol?

_____

5. In your English classes, did you deal with Ireland in any way?
( ) no → question 8.
( ) yes → What additional materials apart from the course book did you use? (→ question 6.)

_____

6.a. Do you think that such cultural education at school has been helpful towards your understanding of the country?
( ) very helpful ( ) helpful ( ) less helpful ( ) of little use ( ) of no use

6.b. Do you think that school has prepared you well for a possible stay in Ireland?
( ) very well ( ) well ( ) OK ( ) rather badly ( ) very badly

6.c. If you have already been to Ireland, do your experiences correspond with Ireland's picture presented at school?
( ) absolutely ( ) in general ( ) to some degree ( ) hardly ( ) not at all

7.a. Please write down the topics concerning Ireland which you talked about at school.

_____

7.b. Which of the topics dealt with did you like best or interested you most? Why?

_____

7.c. Which of the topics dealt with did you like least or interested you least? Why?

_____

8. In regard to Ireland, what aspects would interest you particularly? Which aspects were not covered?

_____

9. What improvements in the teaching of Irish culture would you propose? What would you criticise?

_____

10. Is there anything you would like to add on the subject *Ireland*?

_____

## Finally, here are a few questions for you to test you knowledge on Ireland:

A. Does Galway belong to the Republic or the North?
_____

B. How many inhabitants does Ireland have?
( ) ~ 4 million ( ) ~ 8 million ( ) 11 million

C. What are the colours of the Irish flag?
_____

D. When was Ireland divided (Republic - North)?
( ) 1916 ( ) 1921 ( ) 1956

E. What is the Irish/Gaelic name for Ireland?
_____

F. What is *Guinness*?
( ) whiskey ( ) first name ( ) beer

G. Which Irish personalities (from sports, politics, media and so on) do you know? Please write down ten names at most!

_____
_____

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# SPEECH ACTS AND THE NOTION OF POLITENESS IN CROSS-CULTURAL BUSINESS ENGLISH

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*The position of English in the world of business and commerce takes on ever increasing importance. In order to successfully compete on a global market, it is vital for internationally operating business people to be able to communicate effectively in English. Effective communication, however, does not only imply the ability to understand and produce linguistically correct English utterances, but to use polite language that is 'appropriate' in a given situation.*

*This paper presents the results of a study analyzing the extent to which the performance of German adult learners of Business English demonstrated an understanding of the norms of politeness influencing the selection and realization of strategies associated with two prominent speech acts (suggestions and apologies) in English. Furthermore, the article contains some general considerations regarding the treatment of these two speech acts in particular, and politeness in general within the framework of cross-cultural Business English instruction.*

## 1 Introduction

Politeness is an aspect of culture and language that invites investigation and provokes discussion on a truly global basis, and markedly so within the scope of foreign language teaching. This is particularly true of English as a Foreign or Second Language, as the position of English as a *lingua franca* of politics and commerce takes on ever increasing importance. In order to successfully cooperate and compete within the international business arena, more and more businessmen and -women are enrolling in English classes, many of which are specially designed to suit their professional needs. Their needs, of course, cover every aspect of their daily work – making telephone calls, writing letters, negotiating contracts, giving presentations and so on. As many learners discover, however, what ultimately lies at the base of their ability to accomplish these tasks successfully in English is their skill at establishing not just a professional, but a personal rapport with business associates as well. In other words, it is important that what they say is not just 'good' English, but that it is 'appropriate' English.

And herein lies perhaps the greatest challenge for learners of a foreign language – not just saying what we want to say, but getting it across the way we want. For instance, let us assume a situation in which you, a native speaker of English, are conversing with a person whose native language is German. While you are talking, the speaker of German notices that you have a piece of gum in your mouth. In English, they ask: "Have you got some chewing gum for me?" If you're not well acquainted with the German language-culture system, you might wonder if the person is trying to communicate more than just a simple request. Are they reproaching you for neglecting to offer them some of your gum, reminding you of some rule of gum-sharing etiquette? Or perhaps you think instead: they've got some nerve, expecting me to keep gum on hand just for them! What, then, is this person trying to do with the words they have chosen? Probably nothing more than to find out if you have some more chewing gum and whether you would be willing to share it with them. While *Have you got some chewing gum for me?* is indeed a perfectly formed English question, it would appear that the learner has simply uttered a word-for-word translation from German: *Hast du einen Kaugummi für mich?* Unbeknownst to the learner, their words can

carry implications in English that they do not in German and could ultimately lead to a misunderstanding between the interlocutors.

The example above touches upon two dilemmas of foreign language teaching: (1) discovering what causes learners to sometimes fail to perform competently in the target language despite being able to form structurally correct utterances; and (2) enabling adult learners of English, in particular Business English, to develop a sense of what appropriacy – or politeness – means to native speakers and what it entails for successful interaction. This article addresses these two issues by making reference to the results of a cross-cultural study conducted on German adult learners of Business English and native speakers of American English (Le Roux 1998). The study concerned itself with the extent to which the pragmatic performance of German adult learners of Business English demonstrated an understanding of the norms of politeness which affect the selection and realization of strategies associated with two speech acts (suggestions and apologies) in English. For purposes of this paper, I shall not describe in detail the parameters and results of the investigation, but rather focus my discussion on selected learner responses as they relate to the issue of pragmatic failure. Finally, I will outline some general didactical considerations regarding the treatment of these two speech acts in particular, and politeness in general within the framework of cross-cultural Business English instruction.

## 2 The study

The specific parameters of the study referred to in this article were modelled after the cross-cultural investigations of speech act performance carried out by several researchers, most notably Banerjee & Carrell (1988) and the Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Project (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989). The study was comprised of a discourse-completion questionnaire designed to elicit responses that were either suggestions or apologies.[1] The categories of politeness strategies observed in the data were defined and evaluated separately for suggestion-type and apology-type situations, but both included positive and negative politeness strategies as defined by Brown & Levinson (1987). The study compared politeness strategies chosen by learners when performing the two different speech acts in English with those chosen by native speakers of American English. This cross-cultural comparison revealed that, on the whole, the learners showed a high level of competency in their use of politeness strategies, with little significant variation between the performance of learners and native speakers. This may be explained in part by the amount and type of exposure the learners have had to situations requiring these specific language and interactional skills (e.g. Business English course-work, contact to English speaking business partners, etc.). Where observable differences between the two groups were found, they often reflected an overuse of politeness strategies by learners. There were, however, some cases in which linguistic and/or pragmatic failure was evident. These were generally instances in which errors could be attributed to L1 interference, over-generalization or deficits in fluency in the target language. A discussion of examples of these errors will be presented in section 3. Instances of inappropriate or failed use of politeness strategies appear in section 4.

[1] The questionnaire items from the Le Roux study (1998) featured in this article may be found in the appendix.

## 3 The notion of politeness

Teachers of EFL who live and work in Germany often have their students tell them that people from English-speaking countries are "so polite", or that we are "too polite". The first is sometimes followed by a remark about how they wish Germans were as polite too, the second by a comment doubting the sincerity of English speakers or how "you just don't know what they're really thinking". These are the types of cultural stereotypes that can develop when politeness is understood to be a characteristic of any given language which is definable and, therefore, absolute. It is also such misconceptions that can lead to misunderstandings between interlocutors of different cultures.

As a notion, politeness is less easy to define than to understand or assess within a given personal interaction. Although we may not always be conscious of the various linguistic devices we use to demonstrate politeness to other people, we are, as language users, sensitive to their needs and our own need to be treated with respect and consideration for our feelings, i.e. to be treated with politeness. There is little debate that speakers from two different language communities will demonstrate interactional styles that are marked by their culture's distinctive norms and values regarding interpersonal communication (cf. House 1982, Coulmas 1981). In view of this fact, researchers have questioned the validity of the notion of politeness as such and argue instead for a view of politeness as "appropriacy" (Meier 1995: 387), i.e. doing what is socially acceptable:

> We do not necessarily want our students to produce a steady stream of *sir, please, would you be so kind as to,* mitigators and apologies, for example. All of the [polite expressions] above can be used appropriately, but they may be used inappropriately as well. (Meier 1997: 24)

Indeed this term seems the more suitable alternative when the discussion of how politeness differs among languages leads to generalizations about the nature of entire cultures or peoples. The response, then, to comments like those mentioned at the beginning of this section would be: speakers of English are not more polite, just differently polite.

## 4 The interlanguage component of cross-cultural foreign language teaching

In light of the fact that all language communities have their own culturally distinct interactional styles, it is no wonder that efforts to promote intercultural awareness are a fundamental component of foreign language teaching today. Elements of language that are embedded in people's daily interactions serve as useful springboards from which to launch cross-cultural approaches to language teaching and are, therefore, the focus of many a module of instruction. Speech acts like suggestions and apologies are good examples of the kinds of language-culture contexts learners of Business English encounter in their dealings with speakers of English. When doing business, a person's skill in suggesting can be a determining factor in the success of project planning and negotiations. His or her ability to deal with customers may be a direct result of knowing when to apologize and knowing how to do it.

Clearly, it is important that teachers cover areas of the foreign language that are essential to meeting the needs of the participants in a particular course. Equally important, however, is being able to recognize a learner's utterance as a reflection of their understanding of both the linguistic and socio-pragmatic norms governing a particular communicative context. The ways in which a learner fails to adhere to these norms indicates his or her perception of how to behave in a given situation, and can give the instructor valuable clues about the learner's interlanguage.

The learners' interlanguage corresponds to their wealth of knowledge in the target language (cf. Bausch & Kasper 1979, Klein 1994, Edmondson & House 1993). This comprises information they have acquired in terms of the formal, functional and pragmatic levels of the foreign language. When a learner carries out a linguistic act, they call up any information – linguistic, semantic, pragmatic and cultural – they deem relevant to the performance of that speech act. Sometimes the learners' knowledge permits them to perform the act competently in the target language, i.e. appropriately. Other times, their attempts fail, leading to misunderstandings or worse, conflict, between the interlocutors. These are instances of cross-cultural pragmatic failure, a notion Thomas (1983: 91) defines as "the inability to understand 'what is meant by what is said'". Pragmatic failure can occur at the level of pragmalinguistics, which concerns errors "caused by differences [between L1 and L2] in the linguistic encoding of pragmatic force" (Leech 1983: 10f.). It can also occur at the level of sociopragmatics**,** which involves failure stemming from "cross-culturally different perceptions of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behaviour" (Leech 1983: 10f.).

Failure of the first type can be attributed to a number of causes, including teaching-induced errors (cf. Thomas 1983: 102). Too much emphasis in the classroom on metalinguistic knowledge, for instance, might result in a learner employing the performative verb *offer* inappropriately simply because it belongs to the speech act 'offering', as the following example from the study suggests:

EXAMPLE 1: "documents"
*I've prepared the wrong one. I offer you to come back to the office.*

Other types of pragmalinguistic errors can be caused by the "transferring from the mother tongue to the target language of utterances which are semantically/syntactically equivalent, but which [...] tend to convey a different pragmatic force in the target language" (Thomas 1983: 101). In response to "salad" in the questionnaire, for example, one participant wrote:

EXAMPLE 2: "salad"
*Oh no! That's bad luck. What are we doing now?*

The speaker's utterance may be interpreted as an instance of pragmalinguistic failure on several accounts. It is likely that the speaker's illocutionary intent was to comment on the unfortunateness of the incident or the results of her actions. Her response, however, suggests the unsuccessful transfer of the pragmatic force of the German *So ein Unglück/Pech* to the English *That's bad luck*, apparently choosing her utterance based on her understanding or knowledge of only one English realization of *Unglück*: bad luck (as opposed to 'mishap' or 'accident'). The result of this negative transfer is that instead of signifying regret for an infraction she is responsible for, her utterance acts as a comment to the waiter on his clumsiness. The final part of the learner's response above may also be considered pragmalinguistic failure, arguably an instance of over-generalization: employing elements of language which are structurally and semantically correct when used within certain linguistic and/or pragmatic parameters, but whose

pragmatic force changes in situations marked by other parameters. The *now* in *What are we doing now?* signals the present, which for many learners triggers the use of the present continuous. In uttering *What are we doing now?* the speaker might have believed that the use of the present continuous in this particular expression acts as an offer of repair in the way that *Was machen wir denn jetzt?* does in German. Instead of communicating the speaker's willingness to make things right, however, her words come across as a sort of reproach.

As mentioned above, the second type of unsuccessful pragmatic transfer, sociopragmatic failure, occurs when learners assess the social context of an interaction according to their native sociopragmatic norms. If interlocutors are operating according to very culturally distinct interactional styles with different understandings of the interplay of specific contextual factors (e.g. size of the imposition, social distance, and relative power and responsibilities of the interlocutors), they are likely to experience some incidence of intercultural miscommunication. One example of a potentially failed assessment of the nature of the infraction is this learner's response to "documents":

> EXAMPLE 3: "documents"
> *I'm afraid I have bad news for you. The documents you need for the conference today aren't ready. Maybe it's possible to set a new date for this conference?*

Assuming a work environment with a relatively standardized hierarchy, the speaker in example 3, in asking whether the conference could be rescheduled, would appear to have inappropriately assessed both the size of the infraction and the relative power between her and her boss. ("You just wouldn't say that to your boss", was the general reaction of the panel of EFL educators consulted for this study.) Furthermore, the non-native speaker in the above example does not admit fault for the infraction, and unlike most respondents in the study, she does not even address the issue of responsibility. In fact, all of the American respondents acknowledged responsibility in this situation, compared to 80% of the German respondents. Like the respondent in the example above, the rest of the 20% of Germans who did not acknowledge responsibility also used expressions which avoided the use of an agentive subject. This may indicate that Germans place a different value than Americans do on addressing responsibility in situations marked by contextual variables similar to those in "documents", and that they instead make use of other means to restore interactional/interpersonal harmony. Indeed, it is conceivable that, in German, the use of agent-avoiders (e.g. *Maybe it is possible…* instead of *Can we/you…)* serves to minimize the effect of the infraction on the hearer. What must be made clear to the learner, however, is that while an utterance like the one above may be completely appropriate when used in German, if used in American English it might give the impression that the speaker is trying to avoid the question of responsibility, a characteristic which may conflict with what is expected of people involved in American business circles.

## 5 Learner errors in politeness strategy use

Let us now consider several instances of failed or inappropriate use of politeness strategies by respondents of the study. According to Brown & Levinson (1987) negative politeness describes behaviour that avoids or compensates for acts which may be regarded as imposing on others. Toning down a complaint or giving a suggestion rather than an order would be an example of negative politeness. Positive politeness, on the other hand, refers to the speaker's sensitivity to

the interactant's positive self-image and behaviour that demonstrates affection, approval or concern. Compare the following examples:

EXAMPLE 4A: "partner"
*I'm really sorry – my boss needed me to do something immediately, so I couldn't make it to the train station in time. I hope you got home okay.*

EXAMPLE 4B: "partner"
*I'm so sorry. Hopefully you took a taxi! My boss wanted me to do something really urgent and I couldn't deny it.*

In both examples the speaker's utterance is aimed at expressing concern for her partner's getting home from the train station. In example 4a the sentence *I hope you got home okay* communicates this effectively. The expression used by the learner in 4b, however, impresses upon the hearer something quite different than what the learner presumably intended. If we assume that the speaker in 4b believed the illocutionary force of her utterance to be the same as with the German *Hoffentlich hast du ein Taxi genommen,* we may arrive at a possible explanation for the pragmatic error. The German *Hoffentlich hast du ein Taxi genommen* may be understood to mean that the speaker had hoped the hearer did not wrestle with his baggage on public transportation, but opted for the convenience of a taxi instead. The English *Hopefully you took a taxi,* however, may not be interpreted in the same way. Rather, it expresses the speaker's hope that the hearer was clever enough to call a taxi to get home.

Another way we can show concern for the hearer is to express interest in what the hearer does or knows by asking the hearer's opinion. In the study, these modifying strategies were used by respondents mainly as lead-ins to suggestions, signifying the speaker's intent to soften the effect of the face-threatening act to follow:

EXAMPLE 5A: "tulips"
*Mr. ... I have one question: is it really right to plant tulip bulbs in February? I've read that you should plant them in autumn. Do you know something about that?*

Some learners, however, used questions which might not be perceived as being polite:

EXAMPLE 5B: "tulips"
*Hey neighbour, have you ever heard that somebody plants tulip bulbs in February?*

Exaggerations like interjections *(Oh no!)* or invocations *(Oh my goodness!)* are also expressions of positive politeness, and in the suggestions data were used roughly twice as often by learners than by native speakers. This may be a strategy learners use to express empathy with the hearer when they lack other linguistic means of doing so. One example, however, shows that if the rest of the utterance contradicts the speaker's expression of empathy, the resulting effect is anything but polite:

EXAMPLE 6: "chewing gum"
For heaven's sake, I hope I didn't sit on a piece of chewing gum as you did.

The above example illustrates yet another – in this case unsuccessfully employed – positive politeness strategy: changing the focus from the hearer to the speaker. Normally, speakers use this strategy to draw negative attention away from the hearer and toward themselves, thereby respecting the hearer's positive face, as in the following:

EXAMPLE 7: "car dealer"
*I would never buy a car from them because when I owned one of their cars, it was more trouble than I've ever had.*

Expressions of negative politeness, the employment of one particular strategy, minimizing the offence, showed some rather interesting examples of variation in use between native speakers (example 8a) and non-native speakers (example 8b).

EXAMPLE 8A: "car bump"
*I'm sorry. I thought there was more space. But fortunately there is no damage.*

In comparing the utterance above with the one below, however, it becomes clear that the effect the same minimization expression (*there is no damage*) has can differ remarkably depending on the way it is used to modify the core apology strategy:

EXAMPLE 8B: "car bump"
*Hey man, be cool. There's no damage so it doesn't matter.*

In the first example the minimizer follows an apology and an indirect expression of responsibility and is, therefore, likely to have a relatively calming effect on the hearer. In the second example, however, the minimizer focuses attention away from the speaker's infraction and serves as part of a reproach to the hearer for his behaviour. In this respect, the effect on the hearer of the minimizer in example 8b is undoubtedly face-threatening.

## 6 Speech act instruction: Understanding appropriacy, understanding cultures[2]

In chapter 2, I stated that politeness is a notion that is less easy to define than to understand or assess within a given personal interaction. Nonetheless, as teachers of EFL, and more specifically, Business English, we are often in the position of having not only to characterize utterances as being polite or impolite but also to offer our students some kind of guideline of politeness which helps them improve their pragmatic ability in English. At the same time, teaching within the framework of intercultural learning, we are not just concerned with helping our students build up an English language repertoire, we want to give them the type of training they need to communicate successfully in the arena of international business.

Because the notion of politeness is not an absolute and can differ considerably from one context to the next or from one culture to another, the goal of teaching politeness is not to have learners memorize a list of rules to follow when communicating in the target language (cf. Meier 1997: 25). It is to help them develop an awareness of appropriacy in interaction, thereby becoming sensitive to the way in which speakers of that language are expected to demonstrate respect for their interactants.

[2] A number of the ideas relating to the teaching of politeness and speech act strategies put forth in this work have been shaped in part by the approach to intercultural Business English instruction promoted by Dan Norenberg English Communication and Sales Training, Munich, Germany. Many thanks to their team of trainers for their helpful feedback and valuable insight.

Looking at the examples above, it becomes evident that the strategies used by learners in the study may be described either as instances of the psycholinguistic process of language learning or as examples of pragmatic interference. Whether there even exists a distinction is speculative. What is clear, however, is that they are indeed strategies: attempts to perform a speech act in the target language by using expressions the learner hopes or believes function in the same way pragmatically as they would in the learner's native language. Such attempts are manifestations of a learner's interlanguage and, for teachers of foreign languages, should be a point of reference for planning and carrying out instruction.

Another point of reference instructors of foreign languages should not overlook concerns a source of sociopragmatic failure that goes beyond the social context of an interaction, and one which the study referred to in this article was not designed to investigate. It involves cross-cultural mismatches in the expression of certain attitudes and values, which, Thomas suggests, stem from differences in "pragmatic 'ground rules'" (Thomas 1983: 106). Kramsch's (1993) research on speech act performance has shown, for example, that the linguistic form a speaker chooses depends on the internal context of an utterance, i.e. the intentions, assumptions and presuppositions of the speaker and the hearer which allow their discourse to be perceived by each other as coherent:

> Native speakers of a language speak not only with their own individual voices, but through them speak also the established knowledge of their native community and society, the stock of metaphors this community lives by, and the categories they use to represent their experience. (Kramsch 1993: 43)

Thus, for native speakers it is easy to predict and understand the underlying cultural assumptions which motivate one another's behaviour. Non-native speakers who are not entirely aware of the target culture's world view, however, have difficulties dealing with phenomena that are perceived differently by the two cultures. The instances of interference or sociopragmatic failure that result from learners' attempts to interact in the foreign culture can lead to a breakdown in communication or disharmony between the interlocutors.

A case in point is a German learner of Business English who had befriended an American couple and had been invited by them to "stop by" if they ever happened to be in their area. Some time later, when the German and her husband actually did travel to the US, they called the American couple and asked if they could get together. The Americans received the German couple, but after a few hours into the evening thanked them for their visit and sent them on their way. The Germans were confused, almost insulted, when after such a short time it was made apparent to them that they were expected to leave, just when the wine was beginning to really taste good and conversation was in motion.

To what extent is the situation described above a case of cultural misunderstanding between the two couples, and how do the American and German frameworks surrounding invitations and visits vary? Identifying characteristics of cultural frameworks which can potentially lead to misunderstandings such as the one described here requires much more attention than can be devoted to in this essay. Nevertheless, it is feasible to suggest that in this particular case the differences may partially be explained by the way in which the two cultures perceive relationships and personal sphere. The Americans probably were sincere in inviting the German couple, but had different expectations and assumptions with their offer to have the Germans "stop by". Americans generally feel comfortable inviting people over they have not necessarily developed close personal ties with – barbecues with the new neighbours or having the boss over for dinner are not uncommon, but they do not have the same meaning as get-togethers with

family and close, long-time friends. For Germans, being invited to someone's house is a sign of intimacy; it signals the hearer that he or she has earned the right to step into their personal sphere. Visits with friends tend to last longer and involve intense interaction – meals lasting for hours and discussions about world events or politics are the rule. Thus, the invitation to stop by the Americans' home was interpreted differently by both groups according to what their respective cultural frameworks surrounding these phenomena imply. Another factor to consider is that the Germans were on vacation, the Americans were not. Because Americans generally have fewer vacation days than Germans, they are forced to ration their free time. They may have been tired, burned out, happy about seeing their German friends but just not inclined to spare more than a few hours for them on that particular occasion.

The discussion above as well as the data in this study points to the central role context plays in speech act performance. The treatment of speech acts in EFL cannot stop at the linguistic aspects of interaction, but must focus on social and situational variables as well. This encompasses many aspects: the role of interlocutors and relationship they have to one another, the immediate intention of interlocutors (i.e. what they are trying to achieve pragmatically with a given utterance) and the ultimate goals of the interaction (e.g. negotiation, compromise, information gathering, etc.). It is essential, then, that foreign language trainers adopt a manner of speech act instruction that systematically enables learners to discover appropriacy in context within an intercultural framework. The methods used should allow the teacher to design and organize instruction in ways that enable learners to find purpose and meaning in the element being covered.

One very useful model is Seelye's "Seven Goals of Cultural Instruction" (Seelye 1984: 48-59), which presents a step-by-step approach aimed at helping students improve sociopragmatic competence in the target language and ultimately achieve greater intercultural awareness on a more global level. His seven goals include:

(1) obtaining an understanding of the reasons behind a particular behaviour in the target culture
(2) becoming aware of the significance of social context on interactional norms
(3) discovering what behaviour is generally expected in everyday situations (e.g. greetings)
(4) developing an awareness of cultural connotations of words and phrases
(5) learning to discern between ethnocentric statements about a culture and those based on objective, empirical observations
(6) learning to research another culture
(7) demonstrating interest in the target culture and empathy toward its people.

Seelye's Seven Goals offer foreign language teachers a model which can be applied to the treatment of nearly any cultural element and is versatile enough to accommodate the needs of a variety of different groups. As a primary intention of speech act instruction for upper-intermediate to advanced learners is to help them become sensitive to appropriacy, i.e. politeness, in language and behaviour, it is necessary to include in any given unit of instruction a complex of situational variables. If, for example, the instructional unit is devoted to "Dealing with Complaints", it is important that learners are exposed to the way native speakers perform apologies according to differences in the combination of variables such as relationship to co-interlocutor (e.g. boss, customer, colleague), nature of offence (e.g. personal, property) and environment (e.g. at the office, on the telephone, via letter). In this respect they are not learning a prescribed set of apology utterances but rather acquiring a sense of which strategies are more likely to be successful in which situations.

The following demonstrates how Seelye's model can be applied to the instruction of apologies and suggestions, adapted specifically to a group of sales representatives. Apologies are presented within the cultural framework "Dealing with Complaints", suggestions within the framework "Business Negotiations":

| GOAL | | |
|---|---|---|
| **APOLOGIES**<br>**"Dealing with Complaints"** | | **SUGGESTIONS**<br>**"Business Negotiations"** |
| What sort of complaints do English-speaking sales representatives respond to with apologies? What are their reasons for apologizing? | **1** | When are suggestions made in business negotiations and what does their purpose serve? |
| How do apologies in English differ depending on who gives the apology and who receives the apology? | **2** | How do suggestions in English differ depending on who makes the suggestion and whom the suggestion is directed at? |
| How do apologies differ according to the type of offence? | **3** | How do suggestions differ according to what the speaker wants to achieve? |
| Which forms (e.g. *I'm sorry* vs. *I apologize*) are expected to be used in which situations? What do different forms signal to the hearer? | **4** | Which forms (e.g. direct vs. indirect) are expected to be used in which situations? How are different forms received by the hearer? |
| To what extent is the following an accurate statement concerning apology behaviour of native speakers of English:<br>"The way in which speakers of English respond to complaints indicates that they are more willing to take on responsibility for things gone wrong than speakers of other languages." | **5** | To what extent is the following an accurate statement concerning suggestion behaviour of native speakers of English:<br>"Speakers of English use underhanded means to get what they want. Their art of diplomacy is really nothing more than clouding their demands as helpful hints and suggestions." |
| Do the participants bring in examples from their own experiences and encounters? Do they indicate a willingness to question the truth-value or ethnocentricity of statements made about English speakers' apology behaviour or way of dealing with complaints? | **6** | Do the participants bring in examples from their own experiences and encounters? Do they indicate a willingness to question the truth-value or ethnocentricity of statements made about English speakers' suggestion behaviour or way of negotiating? |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| What strategies do the participants employ when dealing with an apology situation? How well are the participants able to reflect upon, and consequently act, in a situation which contains contextual variables they have not yet encountered in the target language/culture? | **7** | What strategies do the participants employ when dealing with a suggestion situation? How well are the participants able to reflect upon, and consequently act, in a situation which contains contextual variables they have not yet encountered in the target language/culture? |

Obviously most learners will not have the same 'feeling' as native speakers about what a given context calls for in terms of appropriacy or politeness. With this in mind, part of raising learners' awareness of cultural differences and appropriacy in context is helping them develop strategies to deal with them. This means:

(1) Presenting them with the necessary linguistic tools and cultural information for contexts they typically encounter, for example:

MEETINGS/NEGOTIATIONS
- APOLOGIES: interrupting, disagreeing, personal insults
- SUGGESTIONS: coming to decisions or compromises, diplomatic persuasion

WORKPLACE
- APOLOGIES: everyday mishaps (e.g. spilling coffee), forgetting to do something, not meeting deadlines, dealing with customer complaints (according to one's position in the company), means of communication (by letter, telephone, in person)
- SUGGESTIONS: helping/giving advice to a trainee, new employee, colleague, boss, team, guest colleague from another country, etc. in realistic and relevant situations (current projects, joint projects, corporate identity issues, problem solving)

(2) Helping them become aware of how speech acts are realized in their own culture

(3) Promoting conscious reflection of differences between the two cultures

Authentic, real-life exposure to English-speaking cultures is a given in today's EFL, but I should nonetheless like to address the importance of this for instruction surrounding the issue of appropriacy/politeness in speech act training. Contact to authentic materials (text, video, audio, Internet, etc.) and native English speakers not only allows students insight into the linguistic norms involved in performing speech acts in the target language, it also enables them to understand "the cultural assumptions which underlie the perception of contextual and situational factors as they inform linguistic behaviour" (Meier 1997: 25). Gaining this insight into the workings and value systems of another culture gives us the opportunity to experience that culture in its reality, its variety, and its complexity. It helps us view life from a different perspective and view ourselves from a different perspective with our own variety and complexity. In other words, it enables us to come to a better, more thorough understanding of what it means to be human. And that is both the goal and prerequisite of intercultural competence.

## 7 Conclusion

Discovering the reasons behind the difficulties learners have in perceiving and realizing the norms of polite (appropriate) speech act performance in English is undoubtedly a key factor of providing students with solid foreign language instruction. Whether the inappropriate use of strategies is due to pragmalinguistic or sociopragmatic interference or inadequate knowledge of the target language can play a significant role in the treatment of errors. Working with a group of learners from the same language-culture system, however, may enable teachers to anticipate, diagnose and treat errors more quickly. Unfortunately, error diagnosis can demand more time than can be allowed if Business English courses are to effectively meet all the other goals of instruction, particularly if the errors are not easy to assess or could be attributed to different sources. Well-planned presentations and discussions of speech act elements as well as mistakes which tend to re-occur within the group can serve as a more efficient means of error control. It is vital, for instance, that specific speech acts are touched upon again and again in differing contexts. Depending on the goals of the group and the level of proficiency, the instructor can begin with the speech act and take the students through a series of contexts, or can begin with the interactional goal (e.g. business negotiations), highlighting the relevant speech acts as necessary.

The final comments above address the second aim of this essay: to present some general didactic guidelines for handling the issue of politeness in speech act training. In the preceding section, it was made clear that promoting learners' pragmatic fluency and intercultural competence when performing speech acts requires careful and skilful planning on part of the instructor. It must also be stressed, however, that a willingness on part of the students to dedicate an appropriate amount of time to learning English is equally necessary. Experience in working with adult learners of Business English shows that, whereas weekly meetings can certainly help learners retain and build upon the knowledge and skills they have acquired, learners do not truly profit from speech act instruction until they have gone through intensive intercultural learning workshops lasting at least several days and led by trainers who are native speakers of English. This has to do, first of all, with the participants themselves, who do not always stand to benefit from weekly meetings because their work commitments often keep them from attending regularly. Second of all, weekly meetings can generally only be scheduled for one or two hours a week, which hardly permits time for adequate coverage of speech acts. In intensive workshops, participants are better able to concentrate their efforts on the instruction because they are cut off from the pressures of their daily work. Moreover, such workshops provide participants with a closed environment, in which only the target language and culture system exist.

Speech act training for business professionals, as well as English instruction itself, must be designed to foster students' sensitivity toward the target language and culture. In this sense it is an on-going, dynamic process of cultural understanding, the connecting thread being the students' continual development regarding their awareness of ways in which appropriacy in interaction is realized in the target language. This also means that, in developing an understanding of the target culture, learners should nonetheless be given the liberty to express themselves in a way that reflects their individuality as it is shaped by their own culture. In other words, it means helping students refine their ability to deal with phenomena in the target culture on an ethnorelative basis, the ultimate goals being (1) the acceptance of the fact that there are differences in the ways cultures perceive reality, (2) an awareness that cultures can be understood only relative to one another and (3) the view of cultural differences as a necessary and appropriate element of human nature.

## 8 Appendix: Questionnaire items from Le Roux (1998)[3]

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**"tulips"**
It's February and your neighbor wants to plant some tulip bulbs. You do a lot of gardening yourself and have often read that tulip bulbs are usually planted in autumn.

You say :

**"partner"**
You told your partner you would pick him or her up at the train station. Just before you wanted to leave your boss needed you to do something for her immediately. You knew your partner could take the bus home, but that he or she had a lot of luggage. When you get home, your partner asks: "Where were you today? You said you could pick me up?"

You say:

**"chewing gum"**
While sitting in the train, you notice that the person in the next seat has just sat down on chewing gum.

You say :

**"car dealer"**
Some friends tell you they want to buy a car from the company you bought your car from. You have had some bad experiences with this company and would never buy another car there. You find that the company does not have good service and is not customer-oriented.

You say:

**"documents"**
Your boss is leaving for an important conference this evening and has asked you to prepare some documents for it. On your way home from work you realize you've prepared the wrong ones and call him immediately. He says to you: "Where are the documents I asked you to prepare?"

You say:

**"salad"**
At a restaurant, you stand up just at the moment the waiter brings your salad. The salad falls to the floor and lands on the waiter's shoes.

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[3] Some of the situations above have been taken from items contained in other studies on speech acts: "tulips" and "chewing gum" are from Banerjee & Carrell (1988); "car bump" is from Cohen et al (1986).

You say:

**"car bump"**
While backing up slowly into a parking spot you lightly bump the car which is standing behind you. The other driver and you get out and see that there is no damage. He is still quite upset and shouts: "You hit my car! Why don't you watch where you're going!"

You say:

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